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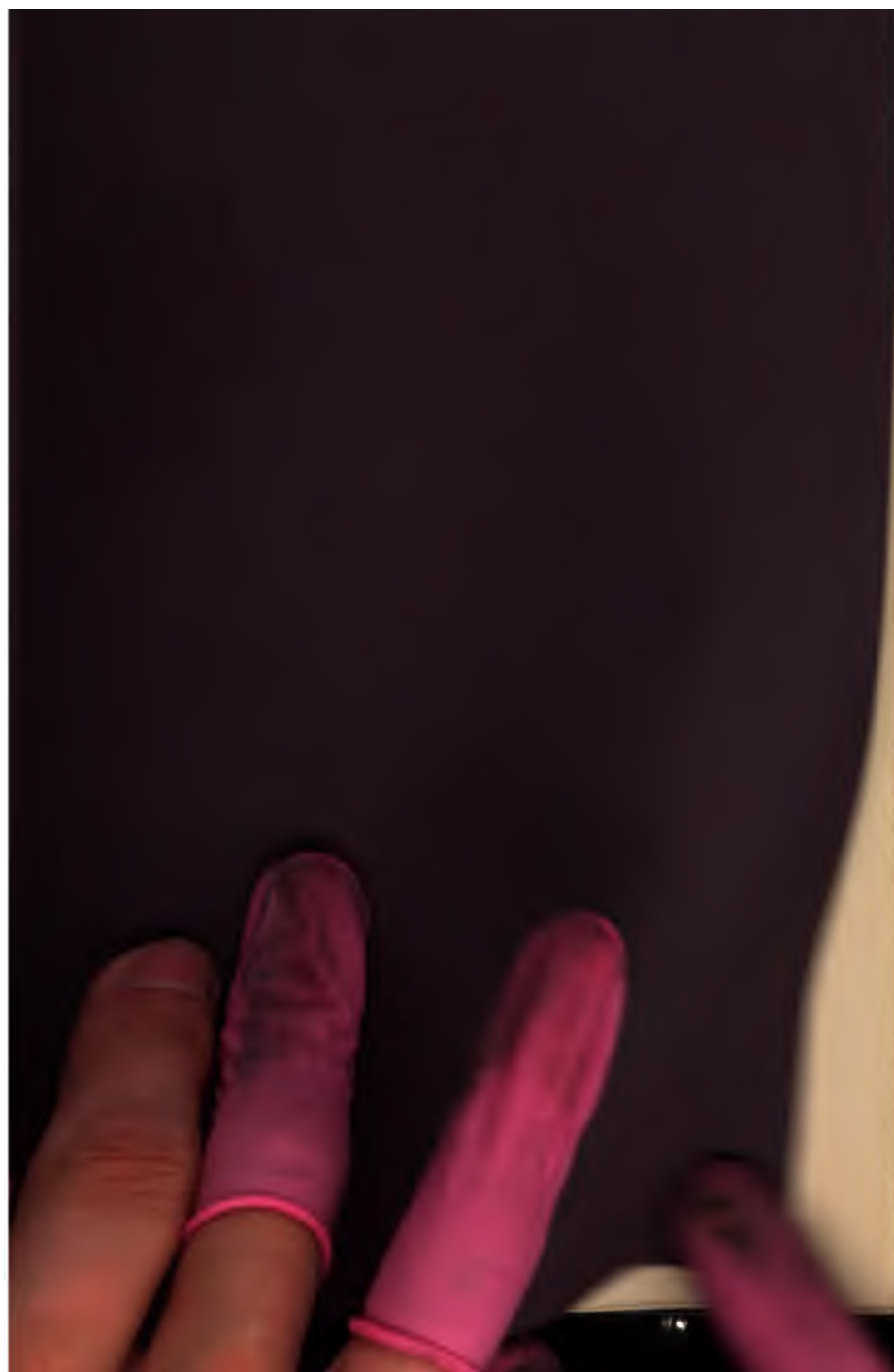
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OLD SIR DOUGLAS.

VOL. III.

OLD SIR DOUGLAS.

BY

THE HON. MRS. NORTON,

AUTHOR OF

"LOST AND SAVED,"

&c. &c.

'Slander is shipwreck by a dry tempest.'

Herbert's 'Jacula Prudentum.'

'The winds of change afflict us. What to-day

We tether tight, to-morrow whirls away.'

Hon. Robert Lytton.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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OLD SIR DOUGLAS.

CHAPTER I.

Lady Charlotte Perplexed.

BUT Kenneth was little troubled about other men's troubles. He was full of his own. That fire of thorns which he had chosen to light, the renewal of his passion for Gertrude, burnt with fierce and ceaseless heat: watched by Alice with sly and demure satisfaction, as sure to lead in some way (no matter how) to mischief and vexation for its object; watched with angry sneers by the Spanish she-grandee; who, though no longer herself in love with her husband, had that not uncommon spirit of jealousy which resents losing worship, with all its incense of small attentions, though careless of the worshipper:

watched by Dowager Clochnaben, whenever her visits gave her fit opportunity, with grim scorn of Sir Douglas's blindness and his wife's abominable hypocrisy; watched even by poor little Lady Charlotte, in a sort of scared, frightened, questioning manner.

'He puts me so in mind, you know,' she rashly avowed to the Dowager, 'of that pretty fable—no, not exactly fable, but heathen story, wasn't it; that dear Neil was reading out loud the other day after luncheon. Of a pagan; no, not a pagan, but a god of the pagans—Pluto it was, I remember, Pluto; and he came when she was quite innocently gathering poppies, and took her away, whether she wished it or no! I forget the name of the goddess he took, but she did not want to go with him; he came upon her quite by surprise. And I happened to look up from my work at the time (I mean while Neil was reading about it) and dear Gertrude was embroidering a *portière* with crimson flowers and white on a green ground, and all her worsted scattered about (so pretty she looked!) and Kenneth had his eyes fixed on her in such a way—in such a way—and his head bent forwards, resting it on his hand, and

all his dark curly hair strealing through his fingers as he rested it; and he looked exactly like Pluto. And only that of course such things can't happen *now* (indeed it would be very wrong to suppose they ever *did* really happen; a parcel of wicked heathen inventions, that nobody ought to believe), but I could not help thinking for a moment, that he was just the sort of man to behave that way; and I declare my fingers quite trembled as I went on again with my crochet, fancying to myself Gertrude picking poppies, with no one perhaps but myself within call, and Pluto coming—I mean Kenneth—and carrying her off! Indeed, he's very like a great many of those gods Neil reads about, and they all seem to have been as bad as bad could be.'

'Humph!' said the Dowager, with a grim curl of her upper lip, shadowed now with a slight fringe of stiff grey hairs. 'Humph! There may be heathen stories, and modern stories, too, of that sort; but there's very little carrying off against your will, if you really wish to keep firm footing: that's *my* dictum.'

And with that gesture and firmness habitual to her, she planted her foot venomously on one

especial rose in the Aubusson carpet (in the absence of her winter resource, the steel fender) with a precision and force that did indeed seem to defy Pluto and his four fiery-nostrilled steeds to remove her, unless by her own consent, one inch from the spot. Which sudden stamp, acting on the already excited nerves of poor Lady Charlotte, caused her to burst into tears.

The grim Dowager turned her lofty head, as if on a pivot, to contemplate for a moment her weeping friend; and when the little weak final snuffle in the embroidered and lace-bordered handkerchief seemed to bring the tears to a conclusion, and secure her a hearing, she delivered herself of the comforting sentence,—‘Most women are fools; but I do think, Charlotte, that *you* are the greatest fool among them all; and the greater the fool, the greater the folly: that’s *my* dictum.’

‘But what *can* I do?’ whimpered the submissive Lady Charlotte—‘what can I do?’

‘Nothing.’

‘But that’s just what I *do* do! I daren’t speak to Gertrude; and besides, I feel so sure of her.’

A snort was the Clochnaben’s sole reply to

this last observation—a snort of utter contempt.

‘And what I think so very unfair, is the way he stays here, you know.’

‘Who?’

‘Kenneth. He really stays on and on, and comes back, and stays on, and on, and on again, when nobody asks him! Now he’s here for God knows how long; for he has put Torrieburn under thorough repair, as he says, and is making a wall and plantation to separate it entirely from the old Mills, and talks of letting it, and I don’t know what else. It is quite heart-breaking!’

‘I suppose if Lady Ross wanted him away, she could get rid of him.’

‘I don’t believe she could! I don’t in the least believe she could,’ said Lady Charlotte, eagerly, ‘or he’d have been gone long ago!’

‘Well, I suppose Sir Douglas could get rid of him,’ said the Dowager, with another curl of the grim grey moustache.

‘Perhaps! but you see he don’t, and you see it suits Eusebia to stay, if she’s obliged to be in Scotland at all, which she hates.’

‘If she hates Scotland, she doesn’t hate Scotch-

men, at all events,' nodded the Clochnaben, maliciously; and the grey moustache stretched to a sort of smile.

'What do you mean? Oh, I know what you mean; I'm not quite so foolish as you think; I've seen——'

'Yes, and you *will* see; but, however, it's no business of *ours*.'

Saying which, with a triumphant shake of her vestments, and a somewhat forcible adjusting of her gloves at the wrists, the Dowager ended her visit, and left Lady Charlotte to sigh alone.

'Why she should think me more foolish than herself, I don't know,' was the somewhat wounded reflection of that gentler widow; 'for, after all, I have observed just as much as she has—all Eusebia's goings on, and everything else.'

Little Eusebia cared who remarked her goings on. Indeed, she was in that humour which, in old-fashioned phrase, used to be termed 'flouting'—a mood of mixed sulk and defiance. She had fallen in once more with her half-forgotten admirer of early days, handsome Monzies of Craigmievar; but their relative positions were a good

deal altered. He was no longer the shy, proud Highland youth, with the first down of manhood on his lip, and the first passion for educated woman in his heart. Bearded, graceful, self-assured, having been a good deal flattered and caressed 'even in London;' liked by men, and much admired by women; with a sweet and courteous temper, and great power of adapting himself to whatever set he happened to be in; a first-rate shot, a first-rate reel dancer, a first-rate curler, a first-rate angler, kind to his small scattered handful of tenantry; poor, and not a whit ashamed of the fact,—he had won his way to a good many hearts, both male and female.

He had his 'melancholy story,' too—a great thing with the softer sex. He had been married since the days he knew Eusebia; married for a year and a day—no more. Like the 'Merry Bachelor' in Rückert's beautiful ballad, he had wept in anguish over two locks of hair: one, a ringlet as long and glossy as ever was shorn from beauty's head; and one a little pinch of down, that might be hair or soft bird's plumage, that lay curled up in the long ringlet, as the little dead head had lain in the dead bosom of that

‘mother of a moment,’ after she had passed away.

Craigievar had been very gentle to his young wife, and very sorry for her loss. It was now five years since he had been widowed, and the elasticity of youth and life overbore each day more and more that cloud-dream of the past; but it had made him still more interesting.

From a philosophical point of view it is of course lamentable to consider that had he been a stumpy, sallow, blear-eyed widower, his grief would not have gained so much sympathy; but as it was, when he looked sad (and he was still melancholy at times), the fair ladies who watched him set it down to one sole cause. He might, it is true, be only bored at that particular party—or extremely tired with ‘a good day’s sport,’—or perhaps merely have forgotten his cigar-case;—but they invariably decided that he was ‘thinking of his lost Mary,’ and it was quite amazing how many of her own sex were willing to console him.

CHAPTER II.

Love Troubles.

THERE, then, once more was Craigievar! And here was Eusebia, a beauty beginning fast to fade and harden, and much too shrewd and clever, and dependent on that beauty for her enjoyment of life, not to be quite aware of the fact. Restless, discontented, disappointed, gnawing her own heart at times for very wrath at her marriage, in which, as she considered, there had been so much deception as to Kenneth's position and fortune; and in which, as *he* considered, there had been yet greater deception as to her age, and certain circumstances which had caused demands for her hand in marriage to be so little pressed, as to leave her still free when he chanced to come to Grenada to recover health and spirits after his fever in Spain.

Craigievar at first saw Eusebia with more curiosity than interest, as a woman he remembered to have once passionately admired. Then each thought of the other with that strange fictitious emotion—emotion at least which has nothing personally to do with the object that causes it—which most of us feel at sudden meetings with those who *date our lives*. Eusebia saw with a sudden rush the lake, the decorated hut, the early married days when as yet, though vain and coquettish with all, she still preferred Kenneth; and Craigievar, the days when, still a youth and a bachelor, he had not laid his fair white rose of a wife in the grave, with her cold little bud beside her.

He saw with obvious tenderness pale little Effie, Eusebia's only child. He too had dreamed he was a father, and woke next morning alone. He thought more of Effie at first than of her mother. Then he perceived how unhappy and angry was the woman he remembered an exulting bride, with her husband madly 'in love' with her, and all London at her feet; and something kinder stole in on his thoughts of her.

But why count the steps of the ladder by which

such thoughts climb into mist, seeking better sunshine? Older than Kenneth, much older than Craigievar, Eusebia added to all her experience of life special experience of *men*; and the old empire was resumed, and the old songs sung, and boats went out on the lake to the Hut, and returned without Kenneth; and Kenneth not only was not missed, but purposely eluded!

He took it strangely; he was stung, but not jealous. Perhaps in his wild mood he rather wished she would 'run away' from him. He was sick of her, of debt, of life, of everything but the thoughts of Gertrude. He could not trouble his head about his Spanish wife. Strange to say, the very calm that surrounded Gertrude had a charm for him. That calm, the very essence of which was home, and peace, and purity—that calm which, if it were within the bounds of possibility he should be listened to, must depart for ever!

Gertrude meanwhile struggled with a certain feeling of embarrassment in his presence. She cast about how, as Lady Clochnaben had expressed it, to 'get rid of him' without dealing too harshly by a half-ruined man; she had become fully aware of, and alarmed by, the indiscretion

(if it were no more) of Eusebia's conduct. Once—once only—tenderly and timidly, she had attempted to warn her. They had been such friends! She had been so fond of Eusebia!

They were in the dressing-room of the latter: who had come in late from the lake with Craigievar, and had been making a toilette more hurried than was her wont. She was clasping in one of her earrings while Gertrude spoke; she turned, still clasping it, with one of those sudden graceful movements, that tossed her veils and fringes round her like dark billows—a demon Venus rising from inky waves. Her beautiful flashing eyes fixed the speaker full in the face; a scornful smile trembled on her short upper lip, and showed the still white and even teeth beneath; her cheeks alone looked a little haggard and fallen under the crimson rouge. She laughed.

‘Ha! you steal my bad husband; and you want now perhaps to take my *adornateur*, my *amigo*! Be content with your portion! Do not trouble me. I have already enough sore in my heart.’

And as the long pendant clasped with a snap, she made another rapid volte-face to her mirror, and ceased to speak; contemplating fixedly her

own image, with something of sadness mixed with her fierceness that gradually vanished and left her looking—as she intended to look when they should go downstairs to dinner.

Gertrude almost shuddered as she took Kenneth's arm that day to pass to that familiar meal, and started more than once when addressed by others. She was ruminating how 'to get rid of him.' And how also to get rid of—Eusebia, and the fearful future that seemed to threaten for both!

That very night Kenneth wrote to Gertrude, as wild a letter as ever was written by an unprincipled man to a woman he was enamoured of. To say the 'woman he loved,' would be to profane the word.

And Gertrude answered him. She alluded courageously to all the past. She inclosed a copy of the little note of farewell which Lorimer Boyd had taken to him when it was agreed he should leave Naples. She spoke of the faith sworn to her husband at the altar; and even if such vows had never existed, of her unalterable, passionate, adoring love for his uncle. In conclusion, came a prayer to halt and consider, to

save himself and Eusebia from certain misery ; and the information that she intended to go to Edinburgh the following day, and remain there a night ; hoping he would see the decency, the *necessity*, of withdrawing from Glenrossie before her return ; no longer mocking the hospitality he received, or paining her by his presence.

Otherwise the day must come—*must* come when she should confess this torment to her husband ; to her Douglas, faithful and true ; and cast herself on his counsel only,—having done her best through grief and pain to avoid making any breach between him and his uncle, and finding all in vain !

She could not trust such a letter to indifferent hands. She gave it him as they passed from the breakfast-room. The carriage was already waiting to take her away. As Sir Douglas handed her in, he said with wistful anxiety, ‘ I am afraid your chief business in Edinburgh is to see Doctor R——. You have been looking so ill lately.’

Gertrude wrung the tender hand she held, and tried to smile her farewell. Her boy Neil stood beside her husband ; his father’s hand on his

sturdy shoulder, smiling with radiant young eyes in the morning sun.

‘God bless them both, and send me peace with them once more,’ was Gertrude’s prayer, as she leaned back wearily in the carriage, the long fir-branches from time to time sweeping against its roof, and dropping a stray cone here and there on the road that led through the noble avenue.

Glenrossie!—dear Glenrossie! dear home and perfect mate! Dear, handsome boy, so like her one love of life—her unequalled Douglas! God bless them, and send her peace. Amen.

CHAPTER III.

Alice makes some Discoveries.

WHAT were Alice's green-grey eyes made for, if not to watch? Does not the cat sit apparently watching for ever? watching for what, we know not. Even when there is no chance of mousing,—in the broad day,—do we not see her with fixed attention in her half-closed diamond-shaped orbits; scanning things afar off, near at hand, above and below; ready to pounce on a leaf that flutters down from a tree, a ball of worsted that rolls from old nurse's lap, the tail of a boy's broken kite, or a young bird fallen from the nest in too early essay of its callow wings? Ready to pounce, ever on the watch. So also was Alice.

All had their plans for that day. Kenneth

had hoped—had meant—to see Gertrude. Sir Douglas had made up his mind to speak to his nephew, and urge him to return to Spain. Eusebia intended to pass the day at the Hut (not unaccompanied); and Alice herself was preparing a little basket of provisions for a blind and dying beggar lodged in a cabin between Glenrossie and Clochnaben; from whom a petition had been brought to her by the clergyman who had been called to administer the offices of religion and what help he could afford,—signed with the initials J. F. ‘Jonas Field’ as the clergyman had understood him to be called.

But Alice had an instinct that something had occurred also at home more than common. She had seen Kenneth give his letter after dinner; she saw Gertrude give the reply after breakfast. While Gertrude was departing, she saw Kenneth step out on the terrace from the breakfast-room, and turn towards the shrubbery, reading as he went. She saw him stop—tear the letter with his teeth, stamp it into the earth, and give way to the wildest gesticulations. She saw Sir Douglas return from putting Gertrude into the carriage, and cross the lawn as if to speak to Kenneth. She

saw the latter advance to meet him, casting one hurried look behind, where he had crushed the letter with his foot. Swiftly, noiselessly, she descended also to the garden. She was in time to hear Sir Douglas say, 'Kenneth, I wish to speak with you;' and to hear the latter reply, 'Not now, I can't; I am going down to Torrieburn: meet me there. I *must* be there by noon.'

She was in time, though Kenneth turned quickly after he had seen Sir Douglas re-enter the house, to scramble together the torn papers he had ground down with his heel, and one fluttering bit that was rustling along the hedge of holly, and beat a rapid retreat with that treasure-trove in her hand. She saw Kenneth return to the spot, search, look up as though he thought the wind might have carried the fragments away, pick off the holly-hedge just such another morsel as that she held, and tear it into smaller pieces, which he scattered on the air, and then, pale and moody, turn to the house. She locked herself into her turret-chamber and read with greedy eyes that seemed to eat the very words. She looked from that high window, and saw both

Kenneth and Sir Douglas, at different intervals, take the direction of Torrieburn, and little sturdy Neil go forth with his own dog and gun, and the careful old keeper.

Glenrossie was empty of its inhabitants! She too could go out: could go and see the blind and dying man, whose initials, 'J. F.' conveyed information full of interest to her mind. But first she would see—would ascertain—would pay a little visit of inspection nearer home.

She was going to Gertrude's bright morning-room.

It was very bright and still. There was no chance of interruption. Gertrude's maid had accompanied her lady; so had Lady Charlotte; but even had there been such a chance, Alice would have easily found some plausible excuse. Was she not working the corresponding *portière* to that which suggested such visions of Pluto's bad conduct to Gertrude's mother?

With gleaming, half-shut eyes, she scanned all the objects round, and rested them at last on a little French *escritoire*, set with *plaques* of old Sèvres china. It was locked—but what was that to Alice? She had a great variety of keys;

and French escritaires are not protected by either Chubbs or Bramahs. Nor was she trying this lock for the first time—though beyond reading Lorimer's account of Mr. Frere, she had never hitherto found anything to reward her trouble in opening it. Now she felt sure she would be more fortunate. And the event proved the correctness of her expectations. The papers had been somewhat hastily thrust back the night before, and peeping out from the half-doubled blotting-book, as though absolutely offering itself for inspection, was the insolent, wild, loving letter of Kenneth's, and the rough copy (if rough copy that can be called which had so few verbal corrections, and so completely conveyed the sentiments of the writer) of the torn and gravel-stained answer, with which his blind rage had dealt so hardly in the garden.

Alice nearly danced for joy! She laid the paper flat, compared it with the other, and gave little strange triumphant pats to its outspread surface. Then she sat long in mute, half-frowning, half-scanning consideration; and then jumping up with a suddenness that Eusebia herself could scarcely have rivalled, she crushed all

the papers together in her hands, with a wild laugh.

Then once more she smoothed them out, rolled them neatly together, shut the *escritoire*, made a mocking curtsey to the empty chair in which Gertrude habitually sat; said aloud, in a mocking voice, 'Adieu, milady!' and left the morning-room once more to its bright silence; unbroken to-day, even by the boom of the bee, or the outside twitter of the birds; the windows being all closed, and everything marking the absence of that sweet mistress whose happiest hours were passed there.

Then Alice went forth on her mission of charity, and visited the dying beggar. Her visit was prolonged till the day began to wane, for death, she said, at times seemed very near. So when the clergyman arrived, Alice was still there. The man, however, rallied. He spoke feebly of trying to reach his native village, and of dying there. Alice rose and prepared to leave him.

'I will come again, if I can, to-morrow,' she said, in her quiet tone; and looking up in the clergyman's face, as she rolled some papers together, 'I have been reading him something I

copied,' she said; 'I thank you for sending me his petition. He knew my old nurse.'

With those words, and a little gentle bow, and tranquil shake of the hand to the minister, she departed; leaving that good old successor of Mr. Heaton gazing after her slender figure with unmixed approbation of her conduct.

'But, indeed, it's not to be marvelled at, in a sister of gude Sir Douglas,' was his half-uttered sentence, as he turned back into the dim cabin, and sat down by the box-bed, in the groping depths of which lay the sick man.

The little light that entered from the open door gleamed rather on the framework of the bed, than on the bed itself; except on the outer edge, where, white and blanched, on the ragged green tartan quilt, lay the helpless and attenuated hand of the sufferer.

The good minister lifted that hand with some kindly encouraging word; as he did so, he remarked a deep-indented scar beyond the knuckles. 'Ye'll have been hurt there, some time, puir bodie,' he observed, compassionately.

The sick man moaned, and answered faintly, 'We'll no murmur at trouble the Lord sends.

I was chased in Edinburgh by some laddies, and whan I was nigh fallin', I caught by a railing, and the spike just wan' into me! It was a sair hurt; but I've had mony blessin's, tho' I'm could now to my very marrow.'

And so saying, the blind man slowly and tremblingly drew in his hand under the dark tartan coverlid, and lay still and apparently exhausted, till the simple minister had departed.

And then the meagre but strenuous hand threw off the faded quilt, and a bandage worn on his forehead, and the keen and radiant eyes of JAMES FRERE looked out at the dying sunset beyond the low narrow door of the cabin; as a wolf's might gleam from its inner den,—waiting for darkness, to prowl in search of its prey.

But James Frere did not want darkness; he wanted light, for he had a great task of careful writing to get through,—and he lit a small lamp and worked at it accordingly.

CHAPTER IV.

A Scene with Kenneth.

SIR DOUGLAS had made up his mind, after long reveries, that Kenneth should leave Glenrossie. Gertrude had not spoken to him on the subject. He dared scarcely argue the matter openly to his own soul, far less to her, but he was not the less resolved.

They met, then, at Torrieburn. Kenneth had shot some birds on his way, and was carrying his gun with a listless gloomy brow, as if there were no pleasure left in that or anything else for him. He had also obviously taken repeated draughts from the flask of whisky he carried at his belt; and the dull glare which Sir Douglas loathed to see in his eyes, was already perceptible there, though it was little past noon.

They sat down on some felled timber, and Sir Douglas went straight to his point.

‘Kenneth,’ he said, ‘I have resolved to speak to you about leaving Glenrossie. A great deal has come to my knowledge since first you and Eusebia made your home with us, which, had I known it at first, would perhaps have prevented my ever proposing to you to come there.’

Kenneth drew a long draught from the whisky-flask, and, in a thick angry voice, he muttered, ‘Has Gertrude—has your wife—been complaining of me to you?’

‘No, she has always taken your part—always endeavoured to explain away or conceal differences between you and Eusebia, as well as those events which—which, perhaps—’ and here Sir Douglas hesitated, ‘which, most assuredly, I had better have known at the time they took place.’

Again Kenneth had recourse to the flask, and said, with a bitter laugh, ‘It was not I, at least, who kept you in ignorance of them.’

Sir Douglas felt the blood flush to his temples; he strove to be calm.

‘No, Kenneth; it was not you. I cannot doubt, however, that they were kept from me for

a good motive. We cannot undo the past ; what I have to think of is the future. It is repugnant to me to live with you on other terms than those of the most loving cordiality and freedom from restraint. That cordiality—that free affection’—Sir Douglas’s voice broke a little—‘cannot exist as it did. It may return, Kenneth—God grant it may!—but feeling as I do, and knowing what I do, there is change enough to make me wish a further change, and that is——’

‘Pray go on, my dear uncle ; go on, old fellow ! Don’t mind me !’

Kenneth was rapidly becoming more and more intoxicated.

‘That change is that we shall part, Kenneth, at all events for the present. I have loved you, in spite of all your faults ; I will endeavour to assist you to the last, in spite of all your imprudences : but I will not live with you in the same home, because——’

‘D—n it, speak out, and say you want to part me and Gertrude, and have done with it. Afraid of me, eh ? a little late in the day, uncle, a little late——’

A drunken, hollow laugh followed this speech.

Sir Douglas rose, trembling with suppressed passion.

‘Kenneth,’ he said, ‘do not break all the links that bind us together. However confused habitual excess may make your intellect, however small the place which love and—I will not call it gratitude—love and memory of what we *have* been to each other may hold in your heart, respect the purity of others! Respect the spotless name of my wife. Better men than you have loved in vain, and borne it, and stood faithfully by a second choice.

‘Parted!’—continued he, almost as vehemently as Kenneth himself;—‘you were parted before ever we were united! Parted, boy! Gertrude and I are one soul; and you part now with us *both*, until—if ever that better day come in your perverse heart—you can reason and repent.’

So sternly—in all their many discussions—had loving Sir Douglas never spoken to his nephew before. Never,—to that spoiled and indulged idol!

It maddened Kenneth. What little reasoning power increasing irritation and increasing intoxication had left him, seemed to forsake his brain in a flash of hot lightning. He looked up,

cowering and yet frenzied, from the felled tree where he sat, to the stately form with folded arms and indignant commanding countenance above him. He leaned one arm on the lopped branch to steady himself, and answered; swaying from side to side, speaking thickly, hurriedly, with an idiot's laugh and an idiot's fierceness.

'Pure?' he said, 'pure! Oh, yes, pure and spotless; they are all pure and spotless till they're found out! I loved in vain, did I? Talk of *my* vanity: what is my vanity to yours, you old coxcomb? Parted! You *can't* part us. I told you at Naples, and I tell you now, that she loved me—me—ME! and nothing but fear holds her to you. I'll stay here, if it's only to breathe the same air. Parted! Part from her yourself—tyrant and traitor! Part from her for ever,—and be sure if *I* don't marry your widow, no other man shall!'

He staggered suddenly to his feet, levelled his gun full at Sir Douglas as he stood, and fired.

In the very act he stumbled, and fell on one knee; the charge went low and slanted: part of it struck Sir Douglas on the left hand, and drew blood.

The shock seemed to sober Kenneth for a moment. A gloomy sort of horror spread over his face. Then the idiot laugh returned.

‘I haven’t—haven’t killed you. You’re winged though, winged! Stand back! Don’t tempt me,’ added he, with returning ferocity.

Sir Douglas lifted the gun and flung it out of reach: then he spoke, binding his handkerchief round his hand:—

‘You have not killed me. Go home, and thank God for that. You have not made my son suddenly an orphan—as *you* were when first I took you to my heart. Oh! my boy, my poor lost Kenneth, what demon spell is on your life? Pray to God! PRAY!’

And with the last broken words, a bitter cry ending almost in an agonised sob, went up to heaven, and resounded in the dull ear of the drunken man.

Many a day afterwards, and many a night in dreams, Kenneth saw that pale, sorrowful, commanding face, and the stately form, erect over his grovelling drunkenness as he held by the branch of the felled pine, vainly trying to steady himself and rise from the half-kneeling, half-leaning

posture into which he had fallen. Many a lonely day in the sough of the wind in those Scottish woods, he heard again the echo of that 'exceeding bitter cry' wrung from the anguish of a noble soul, and making vain appeal to his better nature.

God gives us moments in our lives when all might change. If he could have repented then ! If he could but have repented !

Many a day he thought of it when Sir Douglas was no longer there, and he could see his face no more.

There was a dreary pause after that burst of anguish, and then Sir Douglas spoke again :—

'Come no more to Glenrossie. Stay where you are. Eusebia shall join you. When I can think further of this day, and more calmly, you shall hear from me. Farewell, Kenneth !'

The stately vision seemed to hold its hand out in token of amicable parting, as Kenneth raised his bloodshot stupefied eyes. He did not take the hand ; it seemed too far off ; reaching from some better world. He crouched down again, laying his head prone with hidden face on the rough resinous bark of the lopped tree.

As he did so, something for a moment seemed

to press gently on the tangled curls, like a human touch ; which passed away, and left only the breath of heaven waving through them ;—but as it passed, a sound, as of a heavy human sigh, melted also on his bewildered ear.

A fancy haunted Kenneth that the hand of Sir Douglas had rested for that moment on his head, as it had lain many a day in his boyhood and youth ; and that the sigh was his also. But these might be but dreams !

All that was real, was the utter loneliness,—when, after a long drunken slumber, he woke and saw the sun declining, and heard the distant music of Torrieburn Falls, monotonously sweet—and the clear song of the wooing thrush,—and looked languidly towards the house of Torrieburn, with its half-hidden gables, gleaming through the trees.

Then the words came back to him clearly and distinctly,—‘ Come no more to Glenrossie. Stay where you are. Eusebia shall join you. Farewell, Kenneth ! FAREWELL ! ’

Was it all a black dream ? A black, drunken, delirious dream ?

No : it was real,—that bitter farewell ! All

was over for ever, between him and his uncle Douglas. All was over for ever !

Somehow, suddenly, Kenneth thought of his mother. For a man knows,—if no one else on earth pities him,—his MOTHER pities still !

The drunken head bowed once more over the fallen tree, and half-murmured the sacred name.

Poor Maggie, what easy showers of kisses and tears would have answered, if she had known it ! But Maggie was away,—‘ ayont the hills,’—swelling with her own share of sorrowful indignation at Kenneth’s conduct, and vainly trying to reconcile the old miller and his rheumatic wife to their new abode.

‘ Cauld and strange !’ ‘ Cauld and strange !’ was all that rewarded her efforts.

The young and the eager love change ; they enjoy it. The old and the weary abhor and suffer under it.

Peter Carmichael sate and shivered in the sunshine, on the bench by that alien threshold ; and his faithful cross old wife stepped ‘ but and ben ’ with a murmur and a moan, half of pain and profound discontent, and half of sympathy in her ‘ auld man’s ’ troubles.

CHAPTER V.

Alice imparts her Discoveries.

THE next day was the Sabbath. Peace shone from the clear autumn sky, and glorified the common things of earth. Birds sang, flowers opened wide, streamlets and falls seemed to dance as they rippled and rolled in the light. The freshness of the morning was over the cultured fields; the freshness of the morning was over the barren moor; the freshness of the morning sparkled in the dewy glen.

Neil had promised his old nurse to 'step into her sheiling,'—his mother being absent,—and go with her to church; for which the old woman was already pinning on her snowy cap and best shawl, and smiling, not at herself but at a vision of Neil, in her glass.

Alice asked, sadly and demurely, and very

anxiously, if she might walk with her half-brother, and if he would mind setting out half an hour 'too soon,' as she had something very particular to say to him. Sir Douglas consented. They walked in utter silence great part of the way, as far as the 'broomy knowe,' where Alice had first talked with him of 'kith-and-kin love.' There she halted, and there they sat down: there she reminded him of that day!

Then—in a sort of frightened, subdued whispering voice—Alice said,—

'I know well that, since that day, I myself have forfeited much of my claim to brother's love; though it seems to me even now that I love you better than all—ay, even better than *my dream* of wedded love! But whether I have forfeited or not, I feel I cannot bear others should deceive you; and I've brought to this place what must be shown, though it wring my heart in the showing, and yours in the reading. It's all I can do, in return for your mercy and indulgence to *me*. All I can do in return is to prevent your being deceived by others. God knows what we are all made of! I've not had an hour's peace since I picked up this letter. Kenneth trampled it

under foot just as you went to speak with him yesterday morning; and I was out gathering flowers, and then I thought it looked so unseemly in the garden-ground; and then as I gathered it up I saw—I could not help seeing, some strange words; and at last—at last—oh! Douglas, do not have any anger with *me*—nor much with *her*, for it's my belief there is witchcraft round her, and none can help loving her that see her.'

Sir Douglas looked strangely into Alice's eyes as she handed him the gravel-soiled, earth-stained papers. It was Gertrude's writing; of that there could be no doubt. And what was not Gertrude's was Kenneth's.

Oh, God of mercy, what was to come to-day, after that yesterday of pain?

Sir Douglas lifted his gaze from his half-sister's pallid face, and looked up to the serene heaven before he read. 'Thy will be done. *Thy* will be done,' said the trembling human lips. And hard was the struggle to echo the words in the shuddering human heart.

Much has been said and written of the tortures of the Inquisition, and the cruelty of those who could look on and yet not show mercy. But

what are physical tortures to torture of the mind? What 'grand Inquisitor' ever looked on with more stony indifference at unendurable suffering than Alice Ross, as she watched the flush of colour rise to cheek and temple—fade to ghastly paleness—and big drops stand on the marble brow; while the breath of life seemed to pant and quicken as if suffocation would follow?

But even she started, at the long moan which burst from his over-charged bosom, as her half-brother closed his eyes, and leaned back on the bank.

He had read it all. ALL.

Not in vain had Alice Ross paid her long visit to the blind beggar with the indented scar on his thin right hand. Not for the first time—no, nor for the hundredth—was that hand exercising its unequalled skill at imitation and forgery; nor that apt and tortuous brain devising schemes of ruin or vengeance on those who had offended him.

The passionately torn letter, gravel-stained and soiled, had apparently its corresponding half, also gravel-stained and soiled; and carefully had Alice's light heel and clever hands sought the

very spot where Kenneth's mad passion had ground it into the earth in the morning. But the half that corresponded in form, altered the whole sense of the letter. The sentences referring to her love for Sir Douglas were apparently addressed to Kenneth. Her notice that she would be in Edinburgh read like an appointment to him to meet her there. Her allusions to the necessity—'if all this torment continued'—of confession to her husband, barely escaped the sense that she had to make confession of a return of his unlawful passion. The letter only stopped short at a clear implication of sin. Perhaps even the two bold accomplices employed in its concoction felt that on *that* hinge the door of possible credence would cease to open.

All was left in doubt and mystery, except that to that bold avowal of guilty love an answer had been secretly delivered, conveying all the encouragement it was possible to give; referring to the old days of Naples; to the little note of adieu, telling him they were parting 'for a time, not for ever,' that it was 'better for him, for her, for *all*.'

The passage that hoped he 'would see the

decency, the necessity, of withdrawing from Glenrossie,' was a little fragment wanting in the torn sheet.

No one could read the letter and still think Gertrude a true and holy-hearted wife; though those who chose to give her 'the benefit of the doubt,' might believe sin only imminent, not yet accomplished.

The part that was forged was not more stained or spoiled than the portion which was no forgery. Every word fitted naturally in every sentence. If ever human being held what looked like proof incontrovertible leading to miserable conviction, Sir Douglas held it that day, as he sat on the wild fair hill with all the peace and beauty of nature spread around him.

He rose at length, and held his right hand out to Alice; his left was bandaged and in pain. She put her slender fingers forward to meet his touch, and felt the icy dampness that speaks of faintness at the heart. He cleared his throat twice before speaking, and then said with an effort: 'I believe you have done right. Be satisfied that you have done right: it was a *duty* not to let me remain in ignorance.'

Then he stood still; looking wistfully out on the lovely scenery; the lake below, the hills above, the grim rocks of Clochnaben, the valley where smiled Glenrossie, the speck of white light that denoted where lay the Hut, with a still tinier spark of scarlet reflected from the flag, set up on the days they meant to visit it.

‘Fair no more! pleasant, never, never again!’ he murmured to himself, as he gazed; and then he turned slowly to Alice.

‘We must go on to church. Say nothing of all this to any fellow-creature. Be as usual; I shall, I trust, be as usual. This is the battle of LIFE.’

At the gate of the churchyard were the usual groups of men, women, and children; uncovered, greeting with smiles and respectful curtseys their beloved chieftain and landlord. In general he had a kind word or sentence for each and all. He tried twice, but his voice faltered, for they inquired in return after ‘her Leddyship at the Castle,’ and the answer choked in his throat.

His boy Neil turned into the gate, holding the old nurse by the hand, and carrying her huge

brown leather psalm-book, wrapped in a clean white cotton pocket-handkerchief. Neil gave it gently into her withered grasp, with a kindly pat on her shoulder, and turned to accompany his father to their usual seat. Sir Douglas passed onwards as in a dream; his face was very pale.

‘Papa’s hand, that he hurt yesterday, seems to pain him very much,’ Neil whispered to Alice. She nodded demurely without speaking. It was not right to speak in church. Neil ought to know that.

Sir Douglas sat, very pale, still, and stately, by the side of his handsome little son; and many a kindly glance wandered to the pew when the boy’s voice, full, sweet, and strong, rose to join the psalmody. The young laird was the idol of Sir Douglas’s tenantry. ‘He was just what auld Sir Douglas himsel’ had bin; a thocht stouter, may be, but just the varry moral o’ him.’

So the service went on, till all of a sudden Sir Douglas gave a deep audible groan. They were reading the first chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, and had come to the nineteenth verse:—‘Then Joseph, her husband, being a

just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.'

Young Neil started at the groan, and clasping his father's hand in his own, looked anxiously up in his face, and half rose from his seat, as though expecting him to leave the church from illness. But Sir Douglas sat still, his eyes steadily fixed on the minister.

It is strange that women who have been falsely accused, never think of drawing consolation from the fact that the holiest of all the women whose lives are recorded,—the one woman who was permitted to be as it were the link between earth and heaven,—according to the transmitted history of the Christian religion,—had to endure *her* share of earthly shame!

Nor only that, but that a lesson as to the fallibility of all human judgment lies wrapped in the written account of the conduct of her husband Joseph. He was a 'just' man. A good man; merciful, affectionate, anxious to do that which was right in the sight of God; anxious to bear himself fitly and with all indulgence to his neighbour. But his human mercy extended only to 'putting her

away privily.' He would not put her to public shame, though his own trust was broken. That was the sum of all; till the angelic vision made clear that she who was condemned in the sight of man, was the chosen weak vessel for the mercy of God; through whom the restored purity of redemption was to come, to all the erring children of Adam.

As Sir Douglas listened, *he* also leaned to the side of that incomparable mercy which would spare shame. He knelt a little longer in final prayer than usual before he passed out into the sunshine; and greeted the assembled groups with a degree less of abstraction, still holding Neil by the hand.

Arrived at Glenrossie he shut himself up in the library and wrote.

His letter was not long. It was addressed to Gertrude, and enclosed the gravel-stained papers which Alice had given him. He wrote the address and sealed it, with a firm unshrinking hand; but long he sat and gazed at it after it was written, as if in a painful trance; and when he rose from the table where he had been writing, he felt as though threatened with paralysis, and

stood a moment holding by the brass-bound table, fearing he might fall.

Then he passed to his own dressing-room and sent for Neil.

‘Neil, my boy,’ he said, ‘I am going to London. I am in great pain.’ He paused, unable to proceed.

‘My dearest father! yes; I can see you are in pain. You will have some surgeon? How did you do it? how *could* you get hurt?’ And the innocent boy stooped with his eyes full of tears, and kissed, with a tender little kiss, the bandage over the wounded hand.

‘I may be away more days than you expect, dear Neil. You will do all as if I were here—lessons: conduct: care in shooting: all—won’t you?’

‘I will, father; I will. Trust me, father. You can trust me, can’t you?’ and the boy smiled, with his sweet candid eyes fixed full on his father’s face.

‘Yes—yes! O God! let me trust you, my son, if I never again trust any other human being!’ And to the consternation of Neil, Sir Douglas flung his arms round his son’s neck and sobbed like a child.

In the morning, while the grey dawn was breaking, and Neil lay yet wrapped in happy boyish slumbers,—quick, rolling wheels once more sounded softly along the great fir-avenue; the caressing feathery branches that had bent over Gertrude's departure the previous day, brushed over the roof of the carriage that now bore her husband from home. The squirrel leaped and scampered up the brown stems, and the scattering cones fell to the earth, and lay on the dewy grass in silence.

Great was the silence in Glenrossie that day: the master had departed!

CHAPTER VI.

*Gertrude thinks Herself superior to
Sir Douglas.*

THERE is a grievous moment in the lives of many who love humbly and sincerely, and think little of themselves; a moment of strange contradiction of all the previous impressions of that love; a dethroning, as it were, of its object.

No longer better, wiser, greater than all other mortal creatures: no longer the infallible guide, the crown and glory of life: loved still, it may be, but loved in a different way.

Something of splendour departed, we know not where: something of security vanished we know not why: such is the change that comes at such times. It comes to men in the first consciousness of their over-estimation of some

fair syren whose song has only lured them to the rocks and shoals of existence. It comes to women whose love has bordered on adoration, when they feel compelled to mingle *pity* with the regard they bestow on their husbands.

When Gertrude read—with strained and amazed eyes—the letter put into her hands that morning, she pressed her lips to the signature with the kiss of passionate pity one bestows on a wounded child.

‘Oh my poor Douglas! my husband!’ was all she said. But in that one brief grieving sentence, they seemed to change positions for ever. He stood lower: she stood higher. Never could *she* have been so deceived! Never, though all the stars in heaven had seemed to shed their light on the deception, could *she* have accepted as against him the wretched forgery of proof he had accepted against *her*. Never!

Poor Douglas! Ay, poor indeed. Beggared of trust, and hope, and belief in human nature; for if he doubted *her*, in whom could he believe?

The sick pang at her heart increased. She rang, and ordered preparations for instant departure; and then she once more sat down to re-read

the strange lines penned by that familiar hand. That hand which had clasped hers at the altar ; which had detained her with its warm, gentle, almost trembling grasp, when first they stood together on the threshold of her new home at Glenrossie ; detained her that he might murmur in her ear, before she entered, his hope that she would be always happy there ; his wife,—‘ his own for evermore !’

She was a girl then. She was a young matron now. If it were not for her handsome schoolboy, Neil, the years had flown so swiftly that it might seem but yesterday she blushed through that bridal hour of love, and heard that welcome HOME ; that blessed sentence,—spoken in music, since spoken by *his* voice.

And now, what had he written ? How *could* he write so ? Poor Douglas !

‘ Gertrude,’ the letter said, ‘ I am spared at least the anguish of explanation, by being enabled to enclose you these papers. Your own letter and ——’ (there was a blur here, as though the name ‘ Kenneth ’ had been begun and effaced) ‘ *my nephew’s*.

‘ I endeavour to do you justice, and believe

that his conduct at Naples and many combining circumstances, made you think it best to reject him,—and accept me.

‘I feel certain that no worldly calculations mingled with the arguments of others, or your own thoughts, when you so decided.

‘You could not then perhaps test the strength or weakness of your heart. You mated your youth with my age. A gap of long years stretched between us! I have the less time remaining to suffer from the remembrance of my bitter loss.

‘Whether my life of loneliness to come, shall be longer than I could desire, or brief as I wish, you will see me no more. I shall endeavour to devote myself to the service of my country, as in earlier days. Not in unmanly despair, but in submission to God, I trust to spend what measure of the future He may allot me.

‘For you—you know me too well to doubt my desire that all this should pass without open scandal; and without that bitterness which assumes a right of vengeance for irreparable wrong.

‘I am gone. I will not part you from your son. I have seen what that suffering is in other women; that tearing out of the heart by the roots.

You will doubtless be much with your mother; but when Neil's holidays come, you will meet him at Glenrossie, and remain with him there. I shall see him—but not now. I make no condition; except that you avoid all explanation with him. Let him—at least in this his happy boyhood—know me *absent*, not *parted*, from home ties. Let all around you think the same.

‘I have hesitated to add anything respecting the *cause* of our separation. I will only say that it is a dreary satisfaction to me to believe that, seeing what your first step towards sin has brought about, you will never take a second.

‘In leaving you Neil, I leave a hostage against all possibility of actual dishonour.

‘DOUGLAS ROSS.’

Then followed a very few hurried lines, apparently written after the letter was concluded; the ink pale, the sentence blotted immediately after writing.

‘Gertrude—I find it impossible to close this letter,—my last letter to my wife,—and not say ——’

There the lines ended that were decipherable!

Pore over them, and turn them which way she would, she could not make out more than the two words 'selfish love.' Selfish? was it his, was it Kenneth's? Was he relenting to her, even while he sealed her sentence of exile from his heart? Was there Love in those blurred lines? love of which she was cheated, by their being so defaced? Or had some phrase of warning,—too severe, in his merciful view of her case,—occupied that last fraction of the fair white sheet of paper, so full of suppressed accusation and stifled regrets?

It was with a shudder that Gertrude thought of Kenneth, and gazed once more at his mad letter. Gazed, too, at the answer, so ingeniously fitted in with its mosaic of forgery! She could not doubt who had betrayed her to this misery. Alice! Alice, and (if it were possible to believe he were again within hail) James Frere! He had been convicted of forgery. He had etched and imitated for Dowager Lady Clochnaben in the early days of their intimacy with a skill which had been the marvel of all who beheld it. She did not for one moment doubt what had happened: and, strange to say, the more she thought of it, the less miserable she felt. It was

all so transparently clear. She had only to get to Douglas—(poor Douglas!)—and explain it, and say, ‘Half this letter is indeed mine, but the other half is a forgery; how *could* you believe in it?’ and then—then—she would be happier than ever!

Happy, with the weight off her heart of all past partial concealments (all attempted for *his* sake—his own dear sake,—to save *him* pain); happy with the embarrassment of Kenneth’s presence removed for good; happy, *alone* in the lovely home of Glenrossie with her husband; without Alice,—cruel, cunning, cat-like Alice.

Only her husband, and her boy, and her mother, and true friends! Oh! happy; happy.

CHAPTER VII.

On Wings of Hope: a Journey.

THE AGER, almost elate, dying to be in Sir Douglas's presence; in his kindly clasping arms; Gertrude tied her bonnet-strings with hurried trembling fingers; and telling her maid that very important business had called Sir Douglas to London, and that she was to follow him with Lady Charlotte, sent that shrewd abigail to Glenrossie with the message, and continued her preparations without a word to her mother of the dreadful letter, only that 'important business' called them to town; and with an effort at gaiety, which even to that simple-minded parent seemed strange and hysterical.

Then she suddenly bethought her of the proof—the easy proof of forgery, which lay in her desk at Glenrossie, the first rough copy of her letter to

Kenneth—not meant, indeed, for a rough copy, but cast aside after writing it, as containing passages, reasoning with him, which were as well omitted. She *must* get that letter. The delay of getting that must be borne, and then she would set out for their London home, and see her husband. Lady Charlotte might wait for her in Edinburgh; it was needless fatigue for that fragile traveller to go to Glenrossie and back. Gertrude would go alone.

She did go alone. Pale and excited, she passed by the good old butler, who had already settled in his own mind that things looked ‘no canny’ in his master’s hurried departure. She asked for Neil as she flitted by, and was told he was out with the keeper; then, swift and noiseless as a ghost, she reached the door of her own bright morning-room and opened it wide.

It was already occupied.

There in the sunshine—witch-like and spiteful—smiling a smile such as ought never to wreath a woman’s lips, sat Alice Ross, curled up and lounging on the green ottoman, Kenneth’s favourite resort. She did not immediately perceive Gertrude; she was smiling that evil smile at the

maid ; who stood in her shawl and bonnet as she had arrived, nervously pinning and unpinning her large pebble brooch, and staring down at Miss Ross, who had just finished a sentence of which the word 'packing' was all that reached Gertrude's ear.

The maid uttered an exclamation at sight of her lady, and curtsied ; and Alice, startled into attention, rose, or rather leaped, with feline activity, from her feline attitude of repose.

The pale mistress of Glenrossie Castle looked steadily at her false sister-in-law, on whose lips the odd smile still flickered with a baleful light, and who, having risen, continued mutely standing, neither bidding good-morrow, nor otherwise acknowledging her presence.

'This is *my* room,' said Lady Ross, as, unable to restrain her impatience to possess herself of her letter, she advanced to the escritoire.

The proud sentence of dismissal changed Alice's smile to a little audible laugh.

'True, but ye were not expected here,' she said ; with slow Scotch emphasis on the '*not*.'

Then, as Gertrude feverishly searched, and searched in vain, for the purloined paper, and

turned at last, (paler than ever) to conscious 'Ailie,'—convinced through whose misdoing it was no longer there—the half-sister of Sir Douglas, with mocking bitterness, added,—

'Kenneth's off for Edinburgh, like other folk. It's hard to be parted from what one loves.'

There was a world of emphasis in the creature's last slow sentence.

'God forgive you, Alice Ross!' said Gertrude; 'Douglas never will,—when he knows all.'

'That will be very unchristian,' said the imperturbed and imperturbable Ailie. And with a repetition of the audible little laugh, she tossed the ends of her boa together, and glided out of the room, and was down the corridor and up the stair and away to her own tower chamber, before the heavy shivering sigh from Gertrude's heart had died away in silence.

It was perhaps with a wistful excuse for the great and honest anxiety which weighed on his mind, that the old butler came to the door and knocked, though it still stood half open, inquiring doubtfully whether her 'Leddyskip' would not take some refreshment after her journey.

Gertrude did not at first hear or heed him. She stood with her eyes fixed on the escritoire, and murmured to herself half aloud, 'Oh! what shall I do?'

'Trust in God,' said the old servant.

He had seen three generations now of this house, and considered himself as much a part of it as the very trees on whose rough branches, when Sir Douglas and Kenneth were boys, their cold stepmother had hung the two dogs.

Trust in God.

Then Gertrude looked up, and said gently, and rather absently,—'I am going to London. Tell Neil when he comes in.'

'When will ye be back, my Leddy?'

The question nearly broke down her resolve to seem calm. She faltered out the words, 'I expect we shall be back in a couple of days or so.'

WE. The old man looked doubtfully and compassionately at her, and left the apartment. After a minute's pause Gertrude left it also. She looked back as she quitted it. That lovely room, with all its chosen treasures!

The sentence that spoke of her coming to it

only as a visitor—that sentence in Sir Douglas's letter which bid her 'meet Neil at Glenrossie during his holidays'—rose in her mind with spectral force. She chased it away, and smiled—a quivering, tender smile. Soon she would see that dear husband, and convince him! Soon all would be well again. They would yet chat and laugh together, by winter hearth and summer sunshine, in that room!

Eyes followed her as she departed. The eyes of keen, watchful Alice, peering from her tower; the eyes, faded, wrinkled, and kindly, of the aged butler, who had seen Old Sir Douglas a cradled child! The eyes of her maid, who, neither better nor worse than others of her class, had been listening to all sorts of malevolent gossip and evil prophecy from Alice Ross, and had been prepared for thorough belief in that gossip, by inspection of Sir Douglas's letter before it even reached her lady's hand.

For they all had an instinct that something unusual was going on. Why should Sir Douglas write, when in an hour or two her mistress would be home? Why should Lady Ross herself sit half the night before she went to

Edinburgh, writing, and forgetting to undress — though her weary mind coughed and sighed, to remind her that she was waiting in the ante-room, the candles burning low, and yawns becoming more and more frequent? Why?

'Sir Douglas and Lady were certainly going to part, only Lady didn't wish it, because of her reputation; and Mr. Kenneth was at the bottom of it all.'

How very quickly did the household arrive at this portentous conclusion, which Sir Douglas imagined could be kept a secret from every one!

A secret! You may keep a secret from your bosom friend; from your father confessor; but *not* from the man who stands behind your chair at dinner, or the female who 'lays out' your dressing things at night. Your looks are their books; your thoughts their principal subject of speculation: your actions, in *esse* or *posse*, the main topic of their mutual discourse.

Neil dined and supped (most discontentedly) alone with Alice, whom he profoundly disliked, that day; and wondered with the keeper during the rest of his time, whatever could have happened to his father's hand?

And the old keeper shook his head solemnly, and repeated for the fiftieth time that it was 'maist surprisin' for gude Sir Douglas hadna a gun oot wi' him the morn.' And it was more surprising still that he had given no account of the accident to any one.

And so they all chatted, and wondered; while Gertrude travelled 'on and on,' like a princess in a fairy tale, till at length on the morrow the haven was reached, and she stood on the steps of her London home, and entered it.

Yes; Sir Douglas *had* arrived the night but one previous. He was out just then, but he was *there*; in their usual abode when in town.

And Gertrude also was there! She drew a long breath, a happy sigh; and pressed her mother's anxious little hand with a languid weary smile of joy.

She had only to wait for his coming in; and then all would be well.

Only to wait.

CHAPTER VIII.

Waiting for Joy.

GERTRUDE waited. At first patiently, pleasurable; her soft glad eyes wandering over familiar objects; all diverse, but all covered by the misty cloud of her one thought.

Then she grew restless; and rose, and walked to and fro over the rich carpet, with that pain at the temples and in the knees which comes to nervous persons who have waited too long in anxiety and suspense.

Then she became exhausted and weary. All day long she had not broken her fast; she could not eat; something seemed to choke her in the attempt. She grew paler and paler, till at last Lady Charlotte's increasing alarm took the shape of words, which framed themselves into a little plaintive scolding.

‘Now, Gertrude, *I* can see that whatever news Douglas has sent you, isn’t pleasant news; and I don’t want to interfere between man and wife, or ask what you don’t offer to tell me, though I’ve been wondering all day what has happened; and whether he has put his money into a lottery, and lost it; or what; for I know nothing new has happened to Kenneth. Not that Douglas is a likely man to put into a lottery, but still, however superior he may be, he might choose the wrong number, you know, and draw a blank, and you would have to retrench. Indeed, I once knew a man (a very clever man and a friend of your father’s) who was quite ruined by putting into a lottery. He chose 503, and the winning number was 505—only two off!—so very distressing and provoking! However, he taught drawing afterwards, in crayons and pastels, and did pretty well, and people were very sorry for him. But what I wanted to say was this—that you really *must* eat something, if only a sandwich, or a biscuit; for I am sure Douglas will be quite vexed when he comes in, to see you looking as you do. And you won’t be able to talk matters over with him, or settle what should be done.’

The last of these wandering sentences was the one that roused Gertrude. True, she would not be able to talk matters over, if she felt as faint and exhausted as she did then. She would take something. She rang, and ordered biscuits and wine, and smiled over them at her mother, who, still dissatisfied, pulled her ringlet, and even bit the end of it, (which she only did in great extremities,) saying, 'I wish you would tell me, Gertrude: I do so hate mysteries.'

'So do I, my little mother; but this is Douglas's secret, not mine;' and with a gentle embrace, Gertrude hushed the querulous little woman. Then turning with a sigh to the window,—'It is getting very late,' she said, 'Douglas must be dining at his club. Call me when he comes, and I will lie down on the sofa meanwhile.'

The fatigue and agitation of the day, and the nourishment, light as it was, that Gertrude had taken, together with the increasing stillness and dimness of all things round her, soon lulled her senses into torpor, and suspense was lost in a deep, quiet sleep.

Lady Charlotte dozed a little too; but her

fatigue was less and her restlessness greater. She was extremely curious to know what had occurred, and was mentally taking an inventory of the objects in the room, with a view to a possible auction—if Sir Douglas had indeed ruined himself by staking his all on a lottery ticket—when she heard the rapid wheels of his cab drive up to the house, saw him alight, and heard the door of the library open and swing to, as he entered that sanctum.

Lady Charlotte glanced towards her daughter, who was still sleeping profoundly. It was a pity to wake her. She would go first by herself and see Sir Douglas, and he could come by and by to Gertrude.

In pursuance of this resolve, she went gently down the broad staircase; somewhat haunted by recollections of days when Eusebia used to sail down them, dressed in very full dress for the opera, outshining her hostess sister-in-law alike in the multiplicity of her gowns and of her conquests, and preceding Gertrude, more simply attired and leaning in dull domesticity on her husband's arm.

‘And now only suppose he *is* ruined; it will

be worse even than Kenneth!’ thought the perturbed mother, as she pushed the heavy green baize door forward, and came into Sir Douglas’s presence.

‘Oh, dear!’

That feeble ejaculation was all she could utter, as she stood, extremely frightened and perplexed, pulling her long curl to a straight line in her agitation.

For it seemed to her that if ever she saw the image of a ruined man, she saw it now!

The table was loaded with parcels, with parchments, with letters; a hatcase and a sword-case were at one end, and an open paper, looking very like a deed, or a lease, or a will, by the heavy silver inkstand at the other.

Sir Douglas himself, pale as death, except one bright scarlet spot at his cheekbone,—with a grieved determined look on his mouth which she had never seen there before,—was apparently giving final directions, to his man of business; and as that person bowed and retired, he turned, with what seemed to poor Lady Charlotte a most haughty and angry stare, to see who was intruding upon him at the other entrance.

Her alarm increased, when with a sudden fire in his eyes (looking, she thought, 'so like Kenneth!') he recognised her, and without further welcome than—'Good God, Lady Charlotte!' motioned her, as it were, to leave him.

The fragile widow had a little access of peevish courage at that moment, for she thought, if this was the mood of her daughter's husband, he might disturb and alarm his wife beyond measure. He might really make her quite ill after all her fatigue. Her poor tired Gertrude! It would be so very unfair!

Lady Charlotte was a weak woman, but what strength she had, lay in love for her daughter; and though rather afraid of Sir Douglas at all times, she was least afraid when it was a question of Gertrude's well-being. Like the lady in the old ballad, who saw the armed ghost:—

'Love conquered fear'—

even in her. She was, besides, rather angry with her stately son-in-law for being 'ruined,' (which was her *idée fixe* for the hour,) so she said very bravely, 'I do hope, Sir Douglas, before you go up to Gertrude—whatever you have to tell her ——'

But Sir Douglas did not wait for the end of the sentence. He said, in a sort of hoarse whisper, 'Is she *here* ?'

'Of course she is here. Good gracious, you might be sure she would come directly ; and what I wanted to beg——'

Again Sir Douglas interrupted. He advanced a few steps, and stood close to Lady Charlotte, looking down on her, as she afterwards expressed it, 'most frightfully,'—while the hot spot vanished out of his cheek, and even his lips grew ashy pale.

'You have come to plead for her?' he said, in a low, strange tone. 'Do not attempt it. It would be utterly in vain. My resolves are taken. Tell Gertrude—tell Lady Ross—that all is over for ever between us. She may rouse me to wrath, she may rouse me to *madness*' (and he struck his breast wildly with his clenched hand as he spoke), 'but the lost love, and the vanished trust, she will never raise to life again while *my* life lasts. Make no scandal of lamenting here, among servants and inferiors. Take her away. Do not speak. I will hear nothing. Do not write. I will read no letter that alludes to her. So far as

lies in my power her very name (and, thank God, it is not a common one) shall never be uttered before me again.'

He paused, and leaned his hand on the table among those scattered papers, to which Lady Charlotte's terrified and bewildered eyes mechanically followed. Then he resumed, in a stern, unnaturally quiet tone.

'All my arrangements are made. This house will be sold, as soon as they can conveniently be carried out. I leave it in a few minutes for ever. I have spoken to—to your daughter—about Neil's holidays at Glenrossie. She will have told you. There is war now threatening for England; and chances——' (of death in battle for men desirous to die—was the thought; but he did not give it utterance). He broke suddenly off. 'I must wish you farewell, Lady Charlotte! I wish you farewell!'

Whether he vanished, or leaped out of the window, or went through one of the library doors like any other mortal Christian man, Lady Charlotte could never have told to her dying day. Gasping with terror and surprise far too real and intense for the little bursts of weeping in the

embroidered pocket-handkerchief, which were the ordinary safety-valves of her emotion; dimly comprehending that it was a dreadful quarrel between him and Gertrude—not ruin of fortune, or rash speculation, that caused this bewildering outburst—the poor little woman tottered away, and crept back up the handsome staircase desecrated by memories of Eusebia's triumphs, as far as the first landing.

There she sat down to consider what she could possibly do next. Was she to wake Gertrude only to tell her all this? Her tired Gertrude, who lay slumbering so softly? Surely not! She must think; she must reflect; she could not yet even re-enter the drawing-room. She 'didn't know what on earth to do.'

So Lady Charlotte sat on the landing in the half-lit house, leaning on a great roll of carpeting which was deposited there, 'the family being out of town.' And the under-housemaid, passing that way, saw the lady sitting thus strangely on the stairs; and not knowing what else to say, asked 'if she would like some tea?' Upon which Lady Charlotte, in an abstracted and despairing sort of way, replied, 'Oh! dear no; never again—never!'

Which the under-housemaid told the housekeeper ; and thereupon the two or three servants at the town-house came to quite as rapid a conclusion as the servants at Glenrossie. ‘ Sir Douglas had come up to London in *such* a fluster ; and had gone away without even saying good-bye to my lady, though she was in the drawing-room ; and my lady’s mother had been seen sitting on the landing of the stairs, and had said she never would drink tea again ! ’

What *could* that mean but family disruption, separation, perhaps divorce ?

And all this while Gertrude slumbered on. Oh ! how tranquil and peaceful and child-like, were those slumbers ! No warning dream mingled with their stillness. She heard no sound of the rushing train speeding along blank lines, and under dull echoing tunnels, in the pale moonlight, to reach the great sea-port of England. No echo of the beating ocean plashing and heaving under the dark steamer, whose powerful revolving machinery was to carry away that grieving, angry heart,—that deceived husband ! She saw no vision of her Douglas sitting alone on the dim deck, leaning over the ship’s side—

‘ Watching the waves that fled before his face ’—

and seeing nothing there but his own sorrow.

She slept:—as children sleep, through a thunder-storm, or with death busy in the house ; all outward things sealed from her perceptions. Gently barred and shuttered out,—even as the common light was barred by the closing against it of her smooth white eyelids.

And long after her mother had crept from the landing, up the second short flight of bare uncarpeted steps, into the room she had left, she still slept on : Lady Charlotte watching her meanwhile with fear and trembling ; wondering what she should do, and how comport herself, when Gertrude should open those serene orbs and ask if Douglas had yet returned ?

CHAPTER IX.

How Joy Vanished.

THAT moment came. The sweet eyes slowly lifted their long curtaining lashes, with the transient bewilderment in them, of one who has slept in a strange place ; and then the sweet lips smiled, and with a look of rest and refreshment in her countenance, she sat up and spoke the dreaded words :—‘ My darling mother, how fagged you look : is it very late ? *Is Douglas come in ?* ’

In a moment more she had started to her feet ; for Lady Charlotte looked vaguely at her, trembling excessively, without attempting to answer the question.

‘ Mother, dearest mother, he *is* come, and you have seen him. My foolish Douglas ! Where is he ? Did he frighten you ? Oh ! it is all so

base and bad, I wanted to wait till I had seen him, till all was well again, before you were pained by knowing! Where is he?' and she passed swiftly to the door as if to go to him.

Lady Charlotte flung her arms round her daughter.

'My darling Gertie, you must take patience; you must, indeed: he wasn't fit to be spoken to: he wasn't really quite in his right mind; he was raving.'

'Mother—do not detain me—I *must* see my husband! I had rather he struck me dead, than not attempt to meet him now and try to convince him of the truth. I know him! I know him! I know his inmost soul. He will hear *me*, if he will hear no one else. You don't know what has happened.'

'Gertrude, my love, my dearest,—it is of no use—you—you can't see him—he is gone!'

'Gone where? Gone,—rather than meet me! Gone back to Scotland?'

'Oh! dear me, I'm sure I don't know where he is gone, or what he is at! He was quite as wild as Kenneth at Naples, only not so rude (but much more dreadful!) and he said all sorts of

shocking things about wrath, and madness, and not trusting, and never seeing you again ; and, that he wouldn't hear me speak of you,—and wouldn't read anything written about you,—and that your name should never be uttered before him as long as he lived !'

' And you let me sleep on !'

Lady Charlotte scarcely heard this agonised exclamation, but continued hurriedly —

' And he said this house was to be sold ; and that all his arrangements were made (whatever that might mean), and that he had told you already about Glenrossie and Neil—and——'

' Oh, mother ! oh, mother ! oh, MOTHER !' burst from Gertrude in such increasingly wild, hysterical, ascending tones, as thrilled through poor Lady Charlotte's very marrow.

' You let me sleep on through all,—mother ! How could you let me sleep on ? You have destroyed me ! How could you ? how *could* you ? Oh, God !'—and she vehemently disengaged herself from Lady Charlotte's clinging embrace.

Then Gertrude had to bear what many persons in days of affliction have to bear,—namely, that in the midst of their greater anguish, some lesser

anguish from one they love or are bound to consider, breaks in and claims their attention from their own misery.

For Lady Charlotte, thunderstruck at the tone of bitter reproach, and the gesture that accompanied it, from her ever-loving daughter, burst into tears on her own account; and kept sobbing out,—

‘Oh! dear! oh, good gracious, Gertrude! that ever I should live to hear you speak to me in such a voice as that! your own mother! Oh dear me, if your poor father could have lived to hear such a thing! It isn’t *my* fault that you’ve married such a violent man; *all* such violent men they are! Kenneth isn’t a bit worse in reality than Douglas; and Neil—yes, even dear Neil *has* his tempers! And I did mean to wake you as you bid me; but he alarmed me so, and went away at last like—like a flash of lightning from the sky! And after all he may come back again, just as oddly; and you shouldn’t speak to me in that way! Oh! dear! Oh dear me! Oh!’

‘No; I ought not. You must forgive me, little mother; don’t cry any more—don’t; it be-

wilders me! You do not know what has happened.'

'Well, what *has* happened?' said Lady Charlotte, drying her tears, but still questioning in rather a peevish, querulous manner. 'You ought to have told me before. I ought to have known. I told you this afternoon that you had better tell me.'

And she gave two or three final little sobs, and then withdrew the lace handkerchief and listened.

'Douglas has been led to believe that I am false at heart—and for Kenneth!' said Gertrude in a low sad voice, not unmixed with scorn.

'And how dare he believe any such thing? Now that is the man you thought so clever, Gertie; and so superior; and you *would* marry him; and I told you not to spoil him, and you did spoil him. Nothing spoils a man like making him think that he is always in the right; for then he thinks himself of course in the right when he is entirely in the wrong; and if I were you, instead of grieving——'

'Oh, mother have pity on me! Have patience with me. If Douglas and I are really parted, I

shall die of grief. I can't live if he thinks ill of me! I can't live if I do not see him. Where is he gone? Did he say where?'

'No, Gertie! He said in his wild way (just like Kenneth), that he was "gone for ever!" But he can't go for ever; it's all nonsense; and a man *can't* leave home for ever, all of a sudden in that sort of way; I dare say he only wanted to frighten me. I *was* very much frightened. Now, my darling Gertie,' she added impatiently, 'don't stand looking as if you were nothing but a stone image; pray don't! Shall I ask the housekeeper if *she* knows where he is gone? Only you know of course she'll guess there's a quarrel.'

'Oh! what does that signify? what does anything signify but seeing him? Let me only see him—and then—come what come may!'

So saying, Gertrude flung herself on a seat, and covered her face with her hands; while her mother rang the bell in the second drawing-room, and summoned the housekeeper to the library.

The lamps were extinguished there, and the papers and packages cleared away. Nothing was visible, when the housekeeper entered and set her solitary candle on the high black marble mantel-

piece, but a little ghastly litter, like a gleaned field by moonlight.

Lady Charlotte felt exceedingly embarrassed ; it was so difficult to tell the servant that her daughter did not know where her husband was. At last she framed her question ; with considerable circumlocution, and not without allusion to Sir Douglas's 'hasty temper.'

The housekeeper's own temper did not seem to be in a very favourable state, for she answered rather tartly that she 'didn't know nothing,' except that Sir Douglas had told her her services were not required after her month was up, 'which was sudden enough, considering ;' but as she understood the house was to be sold, there was no help for *that*. And as to where he was gone, she didn't know that, either, for *certain*, but he had been at the Horse Guards, 'unceasin,' the last two days, his man said ; and she understood from the same authority, that he was 'proceedin' to the seat of war,' which, Lady Charlotte knew as well as she did, was 'somewheres in the Crimera.' He was gone by express train that evening ; and she hoped my lady would not be offended, but she had orders to show the house for selling or letting

as soon as it could be got ready, and it must be left *empty*.

All in a very curt, abrupt, displeased manner, as became a housekeeper who comprehended that her 'services were no longer required,' because her master had quarrelled with his wife.

Lady Charlotte returned to Gertrude. She stammered out the evil news, looking fearfully in her daughter's face, as if expecting further reproaches.

But Gertrude only gave a low moan, and then, kissing her cheek, bade her go to rest.

'And you, child? and you, my Gertie?'

'I will come when I have written to Lorimer Boyd at Vienna.'

CHAPTER X.

Lorimer Boyd.

WHEN Lorimer Boyd got that letter, he behaved exactly like Sir Patrick Spens in the old Scotch ballad, when the king sends him the commission that drowns him and his companions (ships being as ill-built apparently in those days as in our own).

‘The first line that Sir Patrick read
A loud laugh laughèd he ;
The second line that Sir Patrick read
The tear blinded his ’ee.’

Yes, Lorimer Boyd laughed hysterically, like a foolish school-girl. Here was this woman, this angel (for though he never breathed it to mortal man, that was Lorimer’s private estimation of Gertrude Skifton), not only not valued to the extent of her deserts, but actually thrown off, dis-

carded, suspected, contemned, by the man who had had the supreme good fortune to win her affections and marry her. Do hearts go blind, like eyes? and can they be couched, as of a cataract,—of that hard horny veil which grows and grows between them and the clear light of Heaven, obscuring all judgment, and making them walk to the pit and the precipice as though they were following the open road of natural life?

That Douglas should behave thus! DOUGLAS!

But what was the use of pondering and pausing over that? Did not the letter tell him that it was so; and did not that letter—from her for whom Lorimer could have died—beseech his intervention, in order to communicate the real facts to him for whom Gertrude would have died; and so set all well again between that blind heart, and the heart that was beating and bleeding for grief, in that fair woman's bosom?

In one thing more Lorimer copied the conduct of gallant Sir Patrick Spens. He instantly set about the task proposed to him, whether his own suffering might be involved in it or not.

While Gertrude was yet anxiously hoping a reply to her letter—promising that Lorimer

would write those explanations to Sir Douglas which she had failed to make—Lorimer himself stood before her !

In her surprise, in her thankful gladness to see him—bitter as it was to be better believed by her old tried friend than by her husband—she extended both hands eagerly towards him, and with a little sharp cry burst into tears.

The pulse in Lorimer's brain and heart throbbed loud and hard. Her tears thrilled through him. Sudden memories of her grievous weeping by the dead father she had so loved, whom he had been so kind to, came over him: Tears shed in girlhood, when she was *free*—free to marry whom she pleased ; Lorimer himself, or any other man !

He stood mute, gazing at her ; and then gave a hurried, hesitating greeting, a little more formal than usual. His longing was so great to take her madly in his arms, that he dared not touch her hand.

'Your letter—surprised me,' he said in a thick suffocated voice, as he sat down.

'Yes,' she said faintly, in reply.

'I am here to do your bidding. I have leave

from my post, in spite of this busy, warlike, threatening time. I shall be in London quite long enough to get Douglas's reply.'

'Yes.'

'I would go to him, if you wished it.'

She shook her head.

'It would be pleasanter—less painful, I mean to *him*,—to read a letter, than to be spoken to on such a subject—even by—so good and true a friend as you have always been to both of us.'

She spoke with increasing agitation at every word; pausing; looking down.

Then suddenly those unequalled eyes looked up and met his own.

'Oh! Lorimer Boyd, I feel so ashamed! And yet, you know—you *know*, I ought not. You know how I have loved my husband from first to last. From the days when he was a mere heroic vision, whom *you* taught me to admire, to the days when I knew him—and he loved me!'

'Taught her' to love him! Alas, yes; no doubt Lorimer himself had first turned the young girl's fancy to the ideal of love and bravery he

had described to her. *He* had taught her (even while listening to his faithful ungainly self) to picture the stately Highland boy, sighing in his alien home; the youth, beloved and admired, petting and caressing first his brother and then his brother's son; the soldier of after-life, treading fields of glory where battles were lost and won.

Lorimer himself had 'taught her' to love Douglas! Would he unteach her now, if that were possible? No. The double faith to both was well kept; though neither could ever know the cost. Blind-hearted friend—sweet dream of perfect womanhood—come together again, and be happy once more, if the old true comrade through life can serve you to that end.

Every day to Lady Charlotte's little decorated drawing-room—every evening, and most mornings, came the familiar step and welcome face. He soothed and occupied those feverish hours of Gertrude's. He read to her. Ah! how his voice,—deep, sweet, and melodious,—reading passages from favourite authors,—reminded *her*, also, of the first sorrow of her life, the illness and death of her father! How thankful she had felt to him then; how thankful she felt to him

now. How her heart went out to him, the day Neil went back to Eton, and she saw the tears stand in his eyes, holding the unconscious boy's hand in his own; looking at the fair open brow and candid eyes, shadowed by the dark clustering curls, so like her Douglas! Yes, Boyd was a *real* friend, and would help her if he could.

If he could.

But the day came when, from the hard camp-life of mismanaged preparations for war in far distant Crimea, a brief stern letter arrived from Sir Douglas Ross to Lorimer Boyd, returning him his own, and stating that he had perceived, on glancing at the first few lines, that his old friend and companion had touched on a topic of which no man could be the judge but himself, and which neither man nor woman should ever moot with him again. That he besought him—by all the tender regard they had had for each other from boyhood to the present hour—*not* to break friendship by recurring to it in any way or at any time. That occasional letters from Boyd would be the greatest comfort he could hope for on this side the grave, but if that one

forbidden subject were alluded to, Sir Douglas would not read them.

And so that other dream of hope ended ! And all the comfort Lorimer could give, was that, being innocent, the day would surely come when Gertrude would be cleared. That there was nothing so suicidal as hypocrisy ; or so short-lived as the bubble blown by lying lips to glitter with many-changing colours in the light of day. Lorimer built on some catastrophe to Frere and Alice more than on any effort of Gertrude's. But all trace of Frere was lost again ; and what consolation could Gertrude receive from such dreams, when at any moment the precious life might be risked and lost—dearer than her own ? Her Douglas dying—if he died—far away and unreconciled, was the haunting thought, the worm that gnawed her heart away.

Every day she pined more and more, and altered more and more in looks ; insomuch that she herself, one twilight evening, passing near her own bust executed by Macdonald of Rome, and lit at that moment by the soft misty glow which marks the impeded sunset of a London drawing-

room, paused and sighed, and said to herself, 'Was I ever like that?'

The deep-lidded, calm eyes—which no other modern sculptor has ever given with such life-like grace and truth—the gentle youthful smile of the mouth—all seemed to mock her with their beauty; and, as the brief rose-tint vanished from the marble in the deepening grey of evening, to say to her,—‘Pine and fade, pine and fade, for love and joy are gone for ever!’

CHAPTER XI.

A Separated Wife.

IF the thought of distant Douglas was the worm that gnawed the heart of Gertrude, the worm that gnawed Lady Charlotte's, was what she termed 'her daughter's position.'

For it had flown like wild-fire round the town, first in Edinburgh, and then in London, that young Lady Ross and her elderly husband had separated. 'A most shocking story, my dear,' with many shakes of the head.

'All the accidents were against her,' her complaining parent declared.

Even an event which at first sight seemed a relief, the departure of Kenneth and Eusebia, had an evil result. For neither did that erratic couple depart together. Eusebia, after the most violent and frantic denunciations of Gertrude,

whom she had accused of first seducing Kenneth from her, and then getting his uncle to forbid him the house,—declared that she neither could nor would live at Torrieburn. She would return to Spain ; she would be free.

Packing therefore into their multifarious cases all the glittering jewels (paid and unpaid) which she had accumulated since her marriage ; all the flashing fans, and fringed skirts, and black and white blonde, and Parisian patterns, which formed her study from morning to night ; she set forth, as the housekeeper expressed it, ‘with-out saying with your leave or by your leave.’

She never even inquired what was to become of Effie, or offered to say farewell to Kenneth.

But the latter, enraged more than grieved at her conduct, and doubly enraged at finding that by a singular coincidence Monzies of Craigievar had also chosen this especial time for a foreign tour, resolved to quit a scene so bitter to him as Torrieburn had become, and also to betake himself to Granada,—whether for vengeance or reunion he himself could not have told.

Pale Effie, with her large loving eyes, entreated to go with him, but in vain. He would

return for her. She must be patient. She must go and stay a little while with his mother. She must be a good girl: he couldn't be troubled with her just then.

With all these arrangements or disarrangements, Gertrude had certainly nothing to do; but the world told a very different story. She was a wily profligate woman; her husband had renounced her; she had broken Eusebia's heart, and divided Kenneth and his once attached uncle for ever. Most of the ladies had 'foreseen what it must come to.' They could not think of leaving their cards at the house. They wondered Lady Charlotte should venture to force her daughter on society. They really pitied her for being Lady Ross's mother; they believed she had been a decently conducted wife herself; though an utter idiot, and of course quite an unfit guide for a person of young Lady Ross's propensities.

Some of them *'did hear'* that Sir Douglas was taking proceedings for a divorce; but the difficulty was that he did not wish to ruin the young man Kenneth Ross, (who, indeed, had been 'more sinned against than sinning,') and that there was

very great reluctance on the part of certain witnesses to come forward.

Sir Douglas's sister, for instance, was a very strict, pious, and modest young person, and she had openly declared she would sooner die than be questioned and cross-questioned in a court of justice.

It was a lamentable business altogether, and quite disgraceful.

Lady Charlotte, on the other hand, thought her poor Gertrude abominably ill used in not being worshipped as a saint, and shrined as a martyr; besides being asked out every evening by the *crème de la crème* of society. She was, for ever wailing and lamenting about some call not made, some card not sent in, some rudeness offered, or supposed to be offered. She thought the Queen ought personally to interfere for the protection of her daughter. She worried poor Gertrude to death by little whimperings, and petitions to 'go this once, just to show you are asked,' when some more than usually important occasion arose. To all pleadings that it was distasteful, unnecessary, and that even were all other circumstances happy, the absence of the soldier-

husband in a life of privation and danger, was surely excuse enough for not mingling with general society,—Lady Charlotte had her counter-arguments. It would not have signified ‘if nothing had happened—if nothing had been said;’ ‘it was not for gaiety,’ it was to uphold her; and she *ought* to consider that it wasn’t only herself, it was Lady Charlotte,—it was the family,—that had to bear the disgrace.

When Mrs. Cregan endeavoured to console her by saying, ‘I don’t believe any one of these women believe a single word of the stories against Lady Ross, or think the least ill of her in their secret hearts; but I *do* believe there are plenty of them who are delighted to *pretend* that they think ill of her,’—poor Lady Charlotte confusedly declared that *that* was exactly what pained her.

‘I wouldn’t mind if Gertrude was *really* bad; I mean I should think it quite fair; though of course I suppose I should be vexed, being my own child. But when I *know* her to be so good, and they are all so violent and unreasonable—the Rosses of Glenrossie—I do really think the Queen ought to do something; and you see she does nothing, and there is no justice anywhere.

I declare I think the people that abuse Gertrude ought to be punished. I know the tradesmen can't say things, and why should ladies? I mean that they can prosecute each other (tradesmen), because I had once a butcher who prosecuted the miller who served Mr. Skifton's father with flour: he prosecuted for being called 'a false-weighted rascal;' and I should like to know if that is as bad as the things they say of Gertrude? And there is my cousin, Lady Clochnaben! but I've written to Lorimer about *that*. It is too bad—really too bad—and enough to break one's heart.'

Mrs. Cregan sighed compassionately. 'Well,' she said, 'I love my own girl as dearly, I think, as mother can love a child. But I declare that if I knew her to be virtuous, I should care no more for the insolence and slanders of these jealous, worldly, scandal-loving women, than I should care for the hail that pattered down on the skylight of the house she was living in.'

'Ah! Mrs. Cregan, but you haven't been tried, and you don't know what it is! So proud as I was of my Gertie! But I've written to Lorimer about the Clochnabens; that's one comfort.'

It seemed a very slender comfort, for Lady Charlotte continued to apply her handkerchief to her eyes, and murmur to herself; though she had a strong and not misplaced confidence that Lorimer would rebuke his mother for 'speaking ill of Gertrude, and refusing to call, and all that.'

'I shouldn't wonder if he *made* her call—spiteful and bitter as she is, all because dear Gertie once said to her "This is worse than rude, it is cruel,"—when she snubbed Mrs. Ross-Heaton! I hope he'll *make* her call.'

Poor Lady Charlotte! why it should be a satisfaction to compel a visit from one 'spiteful and bitter,' and unwilling,—let the great world of mysteries declare!

But Lorimer had written, sternly and somewhat too contemptuously, on the subject to his mother.

His mother did not answer him. The answer, such as it was, came from 'the Earl,' and was worthy of the hand that penned it.

CHAPTER XII.

Sitting in Judgment.

MY DEAR LORIMER,—My mother put your letter into my hands. I don't often write, but as she requested me to do so on this—I must say disgraceful—business, I do so; and add my own opinion.

‘You will bear in mind the *point de départ* whence she views this affair; (very different from your own *manière de voir*). *She* considers Lady Ross an artful woman, who, after encouraging and having a *liaison* with a great blackguard (Kenneth Ross), and God knows how many more besides, inveigles you yourself into a similar situation. You were in and out of Lady Charlotte's house like a tame dog when last you were in England; and though, from the bad company

Lady Ross has kept generally, both at Naples and in Scotland, a *liaison* and intimacy with *you* would rather raise her character than injure it, in the estimation of the world ;—and though I presume you will insist that the lady has not infringed the seventh commandment,—yet my mother feels she has a legitimate right to be astonished at your proposing a visit from *her* under the circumstances.

‘She has never doubted but that your remaining unmarried is consequent on some former disappointment with regard to this woman ; whose not very prudent sayings, both to and of my mother, are probably unknown to you. My mother has nothing to go upon, to believe in the absence of her criminality ; and she considers your own real happiness (which could only be consulted by marriage) marred by this entanglement. She now puts it to you : Do you, in proposing this concession of a visit to Lady Ross,—intend to marry ? You cannot expect her to call while *your own* intimacy in that quarter subsists. You do not, for your own character’s sake, contemplate, *if* you marry, continuing to see Lady Ross ? Still less I presume of exacting from

your future wife that *she* should visit her? No girl worthy your seeking would accept you on such terms. The world would not understand it. *I* would not.

‘My mother’s calling, of course, would be an *éclatant* testimony in Lady Ross’s favour, and she has no objection to fulfil your object. But we both feel that had there been no such intimacy between you and Lady R., you never could have wished any female members of your family to continue her acquaintance. You would make no excuses for her: you would simply think what THE WORLD thinks; and the opinion of the world is what you have chiefly to bear in mind. Society will of course place her higher the day after LADY CLOCHNABEN has called, than she has stood since her separation from her husband; but my mother will be more easily placated and managed, if she thinks, for the attainment of the object you have in view, you don’t go beyond what is absolutely required. None of us would approve of that. THE WORLD would not. If she calls *once*, she considers that will be sufficient.

‘I won’t give way to the apprehension that

my letter can annoy you, or that there is anything in it distasteful to you to read. I hope you consider *me* a privileged person.

‘Where my mother gets all the gossip from about Lady R., I can’t guess. Mother H., I should think: only I doubt her being so well informed.

‘Do not think me *pédant*, or dry; I enter, on the contrary, into your present feelings, but I think a year hence you will change your views as to the propriety of the step which my mother is ready to take, *on the express understanding already set forth in my letter*; and I think you have (or rather Lady Ross has) no right not to be satisfied with the conditions. You have nothing to answer for, if her character is tainted. The evil was done before *your* time.

‘I once more assure you I have no intention to hurt your feelings by these observations. I speak my mind as a looker on, and as a man who has been, many years since, himself on the verge of making irrecoverable sacrifices, and who now only feels thankful that he was *suffered to escape*.

‘Your affectionate Brother,

‘CLOCHNABEN.’

That Lorimer read this letter through without grinding it under his heel like Kenneth, speaks much for his natural or acquired patience.

CHAPTER XIII.

The World as it Is.

BUT Lorimer did not answer very patiently. The grim smile of scorn faded from his lip, only to give place to a gloomy frown ; and as he drew near to his writing-table, preparatory to answering that ill-judged missive, he struck his clenched hand on the unconscious paper before covering it with the rapid scrawl which disturbed Lord Clochnaben's late breakfast a day or two afterwards.

‘MY DEAR RICHARD,—That you write, as you say, by my mother's dictation—and report, by her desire, the comments she has thought fit to make on my attempt at arguing on the moral culpability of her conduct to her cousin, Lady Charlotte's daughter—secures you a reply which, under other circumstances, I should probably

refuse to make to such a letter as you have ventured to send me.

‘I need scarcely say, for the information either of yourself or my mother, that it is not *I* who set a value on such visits as I counselled my mother to pay,—or who consider Lady Ross’s welfare dependent on the notice of persons of her own sex, probably infinitely her inferiors in many of the qualities which should most be desired in woman.

‘When I see the sort of women who mingle freely, and receive liberal welcome, in what is called ‘the first society in the land’—when I reflect on the lives which to my knowledge some of them have led, and which would, in my opinion, render them utterly unfit to be Lady Ross’s companions, instead of its being a favour that they should visit her ; when I consider the sort of haphazard that governs even court invitations ; the gossip, the prejudice, the cant, the untruth, the want of all justice, the disbelief in all virtue, the disregard of all things right, and the indifference to all things wrong (so long as they are not found out) which exist in a certain set who nevertheless presume to judge and condemn their betters ;

when I hear them declare that they 'would not for worlds' visit Lady So-and-So, and in the same breath entreat a friend to procure them an invitation to the house of another more lucky acquaintance, who nevertheless passes her time less with the cardinal virtues than the seven deadly sins;—I could almost laugh at poor Lady Charlotte's anxiety as to how her daughter is received! As a clever old friend once said to me, 'It would be a farce—if it were not a tragedy'—to see the fate of the pure and noble, swayed (as far at least as worldly circumstances go) by the impure and ignoble; and to see even the better sort of women eagerly listening to the latter, and believing them, instead of attempting to sift truth from falsehood on their own judgment.

'It is true that ours is a 'fast' day, and England, boastful as she always is about everything, has ceased to boast continually of her superior virtue, as she used to do; (winning a little, probably, at the retort which foreign nations might make on the subject.) She is content to admit that chance and certain commercial considerations run through that, as through every other channel of interest belonging to her. The ups and downs,

and apparent inequalities of justice, do not trouble her, nor the agreeable certainty—

‘That the rugged path of sinners
Is greatly smoothed by giving dinners.’

‘It is a hollow world, full of echoes; some call, and others listen; and then, like the pigs in Scripture, they all run violently down a steep place,—and are choked with their own lies!’

‘As to you, my dear Richard, and your comments on my “tame doggishness” in Lady Charlotte’s house, I advise you to beware of again touching on that subject. If you cannot believe in virtue, at least keep your incredulity to yourself. I remember you always had a mania for parting supposed lovers; as some old dowagers have a mania for bringing them together. I have not forgotten,—when we were both at college,—and a youth who had become entangled by a boyish passion, in a fit of mingled satiety and remorse left the companion he was with in the dead of night without farewell or warning,—to learn from the lesson which the desolation of next morning might teach, what such entanglements are worth; the alacrity with which you undertook to reason her out of the

possibility of re-union, and the pleasure it seemed to you to cut the slender thread of her hope on that subject. Nor, in after-life, when a weak and profligate friend of maturer age had squabbled with a dancer who made a fool of him, how ingeniously you planned to crush the girl, and free him whether he wished it or no; how serenely you boasted that you would work hard to make her *seem* merely self-interested; and deliberately planned "to starve her out" by persuading the *impresario* of the theatre not to engage her, on the threat of getting her hissed.

'Do not, I pray, exert your talents in the case of Lady Ross and myself. Be satisfied that nothing can unite us, and that nothing shall part us. Endeavour to believe for once, in spite of the experience of your own and other lives, that there *may be* such a thing as a virtuous woman in the world, and a pure friendship; even if that virtuous woman's name be the theme of lying gossip in the mouths of fools.

'As to my mother, tell her *this* from me—and God forgive me if I word it too harshly:—That admitting, as of course I do admit, that she has the strictest views of female morality,

and generally acts upon them, I consider it not only an error of judgment, but a *crime*, in this particular case, to aid in tormenting and insulting a defenceless and sorrowful woman, by appearing to confirm the evil judgment of strangers; when, in the depths of her own heart, she knows that she does not and *cannot* believe Lady Ross to have been an unchaste wife, but is avenging a dislike and resentment grounded on a totally different cause; and is, in fact, as Mrs. Oregan says of many of her fashionable friends, ‘glad to *pretend* to think ill of Gertrude’—to punish her for offence given (how involuntarily!) in more fortunate days.

‘I have written to you at length on this subject, because I never intend to touch upon it again, nor to read anything you may write upon it. If my mother does not choose to humour poor Lady Charlotte’s nervous fancies, by calling on Lady Ross; or chooses (as you pompously put it) to make but a single visit, in God’s name let her stay away. But let her clearly understand, as regards me, that I discussed Lady Charlotte’s wishes because I thought it right; and whether I marry next week, or die a bachelor, that fact has no sort

of connexion with my settled and unalterable opinion of what it would be proper for her to do.

‘And let her also be assured, that if I ever do marry, I should have no dearer wish at heart than that Gertrude Ross should approve my choice, and remain to her life’s end my wife’s intimate companion and bosom friend.

‘Your affectionate brother,

‘LORIMER.’

CHAPTER XIV.

*The Wicked Life that Gertrude led, and the
Wicked Love-Letters they wrote each other.*

THE first bitter blow, and the first pang of miserable disappointment in the apparent impossibility of present explanation with Sir Douglas, were over. He lived in the centre of those scenes of military suffering and proud English endurance, which have made the war of the Crimea the most memorable of all modern events. Lorimer Boyd returned to his post at Vienna; and Gertrude continued to reside in the decorated little home, which poor Lady Charlotte, when eulogizing it in former years, declared had belonged to 'a bachelor of the other sex.'

Placed in what might be termed affluent circumstances, both by the generous directions of Sir

Douglas and her own inheritance—Gertrude employed her time and thoughts as best she might in relieving the miseries of others. True, there was little ostentation or publicity in what she did. Her name headed no list of subscribers; was conspicuous in no prospectus; made itself the chief of no ‘movement’ of real or imaginary reform. She did not even bind herself by a sort of nun’s vow not to shop on Saturdays, and register the vow in the newspapers for fear of backsliding.

But all that others did who were much talked about, she did and was *not* talked about.

Those general plans of the gentle and charitable for emigration and education; for help to the helpless, and succour to the sick; found her ready with heart and hand, and liberal purse. Often had she preceded, with steady work and entire success, in schemes of usefulness where afterwards a procession of fair fellow-labourers followed; blowing shawms and trumpets in praise of their own goodness, and assuming to be pioneers in that path of progress where she had previously passed alone, without a record, and without a boast.

Often the meek sad mouth could scarce forbear

a melancholy smile, when some one put before her the advantage of plans which she herself had sketched out and set on foot; and gave the credit of originating them to some brilliant Lady Bountiful of the hour, who was marshalling her forces under silken banners inscribed with her own name, and sweeping with them over the traces of Gertrude's exertions, as the waves sweep over the sand.

But steadily and calmly she pursued the road that led to the only fountain of content her grieved and restless heart could know. 'When the ear heard her, it blessed her;' but she was heard and blessed, not at meetings of animated, gaily-dressed, luxurious women, leaning among cushions of embroidered silk, and setting down their porcelain teacups on inlaid tables—but in the dismal and dank dwellings of the poor; by the beds of groaning inmates of hospitals; in the dark night of the despairing and fallen; or among wailing children of evil parents; whose infancy, unaided, would be but a bitter preface to a bitterer maturity.

There was no lack of news of her husband to satisfy the only other craving her heart admitted.

All that he did, and how he looked, and how nobly he bore the miserable outward and visible suffering which so many bore likewise heroically around him, was easy to learn and to hear. Only the inner thought—the dear and blessed communion of soul to soul in letters of husband and wife—that was a dark want in her life, and kept her pinched and wan in countenance, and starved at heart.

Lorimer constantly wrote from Vienna, and his letters were her chief comfort. He did not dwell on the one topic that was for ever uppermost in her mind; he rather sought to draw her from it to general and wider interests. The world slandered her for his sake, as it had slandered her for Kenneth's sake; but she neither knew, nor would have heeded it if known. It remained for Lady Charlotte to fume and fret over these injustices. Those who are enduring a great sorrow are very insensible to mortification.

But in vain did poor Lady Charlotte,—on being told by some cruel gossip that her cousin the Dowager had said she believed 'an infamous correspondence' was still carried on between her son Lorimer and 'that bad young creature, Lady Ross,'

—declare, with many tears and agitated pulls at her curl, that they were ‘quite harmless letters, full of different things that didn’t signify.’ Her declaration went for nothing; though in truth the letters of this wicked couple were all much in the style of the samples that follow.

CHAPTER XV.

An Infamous Correspondence.

‘ *Vienna.*

MY DEAR GERTRUDE,—I waited at Dover, fearing to miss my letters. Douglas is well. The mismanagement of supplies is fearful: and the horrid red-tape-ism, that prevents the rectification even of mistakes,—in time to save valuable lives, or relieve miserable suffering,—is perfectly marvellous! He protests against this criminal folly with all the earnestness of his nature, and his energy and habit of methodical arrangement have been of use. But he writes to me, sadly: — “I wish we may not begin by a great disaster; though it is something to know that no amount of disaster will discourage English soldiers.”

‘ I passed through Paris on my way here. All

as usual. No one would guess aught was going on anywhere that was tragedy instead of farce, except for the model wooden "hut for soldiers," erected in the Tuileries garden. *That* stands like the skull-cup at Byron's wassail festivals, a warning image in the midst of the daily rout of pleasure.

'I employed my day at Dover in riding over to Walmer, to see the great Duke's nest. The housekeeper told me she had lived with the Duke twenty years; but she looked like the good fairy or witch in a pantomime, always acted by a young girl. She professed unbounded admiration for her master, and said she "nearly fainted" the other day, from listening to abuse of him from some blackguard visitor at Walmer. She was "to that degree flurried, that she was obliged to go and sit on one of the cannon in the front garden, and walk on the bastion to recover herself; *besides having the gentleman turned out*" (a measure which should at once have restored her to composure).

'Here all is (outwardly) as careless as in Paris. Mrs. Cregan dined at Esterhazy's the other day: Gortschakoff, Manteuffel, Alvensleben, Figuel-

mont, Stackelberg, and others present. Gortschakoff affected a sort of jocund pleasantry and careless good fellowship, painful and unnatural; reminding one of the stories of Frenchmen in the Revolution, who rouged and sat down to play cards, till the cart came to take them to be guillotined. Not that any ill fate, beyond failure, can await the smirking Russian; but because of the striking contrast between heavy events and light behaviour. Manteuffel was grave and grim.

‘Abbas Pasha is dead. The chief delight of Abbas, when invalided, was to be drawn about in a wheeled chair by six of his prime ministers, harnessed very literally “to the car of state.” Conceive our English Cabinet occupied in so practical a mode of showing their devotion to their sovereign!

‘The Austrian Government have quartered the troops comfortably in the chateaux of the nobility. No one dares to complain. I saw one of the ousted aristocrats yesterday, murmuring gently, like a sea-shell put on dry sand, at having no house to go to.

‘I saw also a humbler sorrow; at the door of great Gothic St. Stephen’s, a little weeping raw

recruit parting with a little weeping sacristan, looking very lank and mournful in his black gown, and both their arms twined round each other's neck. As they stood there, and my eye measured that small patch and blot of human sorrow against the great height of the solid church, rising up into the cold grey sky as if it never could fall into ruins, my pity departed, and I asked myself if any one's misery—mine, theirs, or any other—could possibly signify.

‘You see I am getting bitter. Nothing tries the amiable spirit like isolation. It is easy to pray in the temple; but it requires a saint to pray in the wilderness.

‘I ought to be quite cheerful. My last volume of poems was a great success. I am constantly solicited to send my “autograph” to persons I do not know. They send me postage-stamps—according to the old nurse's saying, “A penny for your thoughts;” but why, because I can write poetry, should I be set to write copies? A beautiful young American lady (at least she tells me she is young and beautiful) has written for a lock of my hair. I answered that I hoped she would not think me selfish, but though I had

read in my early lessons the urgent and hopeful line—

‘Oh ! give relief, and Heaven will bless your store,’

Heaven had not so blessed *my* store as to stock me with superfluous hair ; in fact, that I was getting rather bald. I hope this may moderate her enthusiasm ; but there is no saying.

‘Write me of your health. Remember me to Lady Charlotte. In spite of the excitement here, in spite of wars and rumours of wars, I feel as if nothing on earth were of importance. The Austrians hate us ; the Russians hope to outwit us. All is flat, stale, and unprofitable, and I care for nothing but music and rest.

‘Ever yours,

‘LORIMER BOYD.’

Gertrude’s answer was more earnest, if not more cheerful. She wondered, in the midst of her own sorrow, at the gloom of his spirit. He seemed to her to have so much that should make life easy. The interest of a career ; no actual grief ; the sure prospect of title and fortune. So we judge the outside appearance of the lives even

of those we love,—the painted porcelain of the cup, which holds, it may be, a most bitter draught. That for years his cup had been bitter on her account, and that now daily and hourly he felt only a different bitterness in that gnawing of the heart that comes when those who are deeply beloved suffer, and we cannot aid them, and those we have made demigods of, (as he had made of his boyhood's friend, Sir Douglas,) do something that utterly disenchant us,—all this was a sealed book to Gertrude.

‘DEAR LORIMER BOYD,’ she wrote—‘I am as well as I can expect to be under the wearing pressure of continual anxiety; and my dearest mother, I think, frets less about me than she did, and looks to some possible explanation at some time or other, which is a great relief, as her sorrow vexed me so terribly.

‘I am occupied from morning to night—I humbly hope usefully occupied—and I strive not to dream waking dreams, or let my thoughts depress my nerves as they used to do. Neil is well and happy at Eton, and looking forward to his holidays at Glenrossie with such joy, that

I trust the very necessity of seeming to share it will enable me to bear the going there under such different, such painful circumstances! Let me be thankful that at least I shall be with *him*.

‘I was much intersted in all you told me, but sorry to see the “gloom-days,” as we used to call them, have come back to haunt you. As to this war and its causes, and the chances of its continuance, I will not fear. When I see how completely and nearly equally men’s opinions are divided on great questions; men of the same average calibre of intellect, of the same class of interests, under the influence of the same habits and opportunities for judgment,—I feel that nothing *can* be done so rapidly either for good or evil, as would suffice to satisfy an enthusiast, or create rational terror. I believe God left that balance of opinion, lest, in our world of restlessness and vanity of power, there should be a perpetual succession of violent changes.

‘We ebb and flow with a tide, and whether the waves come in with a roar or a *creep*, they dash to nearly the same distance. Only one thing shines clear as the light to me—that those who are born to a certain position, or who are

gifted with certain talents, are bound to exert themselves for what they conceive to be the general good, according to their honest opinion, whether that be *to stay* or *to forward* the work in hand. No man has a *right*, in a position either hereditary or obtained, which places him a little above his fellows, with leisure to gaze on the perspective of their destiny, sluggishly to turn his head away from his appointed task—a task which by circumstances he is as much born to, as the labourer's son to the plough.

‘I have heard women say that they did not comprehend the feeling of patriotism; I think I do, not so much for my country as for my *countrymen*. I believe in the full measure of good which might be done; I believe in the full value of individual exertion. It has been my dream from the first, and will be my dream to the last, to watch the lives that leave their tracks of light behind, like ships on the waters. Though the wave close over the light, the tracks once explored will be crossed again even to another hemisphere, and the influence of one man's mind may outlive not only his existence, but the very memory of his name. Lorimer, dear friend, *you*

are one of those who are called upon to *act*, and to make use of your worldly position and abilities, not only for yourself, but for the future of others; of others unknown, and without claim upon you beyond being God's less fortunate children. Do not say you 'care only for rest' in a time like the present!

'Though you cannot aid England and the cause of justice among nations, sword in hand, like my beloved Douglas, you are bound to give your thoughts and energies to her service. Shall I hope you pretend carelessness, as you say Gortschakoff pretends cheerfulness and cordiality?

'My heart is made very sore by the abuse of men in power here; who are, as I believe, doing their very utmost to retrieve mistakes and alleviate suffering. You will say that such mistakes ought never to have been made; but that is over. Party spirit runs high in England. At all times it is an error: at this time of trial it is a *sin*.

'I will match your story of the obscure sorrow of St. Stephen's church with one of obscure and tranquil heroism, more difficult than that of the

battle-field. One of the sick persons whose case lately came before me—a common labourer—was pronounced by the doctor to be merely suffering from extreme debility and want of nourishment. Then came inquiries into his work and wages, &c., and at last it came out that he owed *fifteen shillings*, and, to pay this debt, he had gone on half rations for weeks, having a large family to keep, and being apprehensive he never would be able to spare it in any other way.* Does not the patient self-denial smite one to the heart? the indulged heart that grows too often to look upon mere fancies as necessities in our own class! And does not the strong resolution of the man show brightly in the dark story? I see him, in my mind's eye, going home at the end of his day's work hungry and tired, with his good honest purpose stronger than all the temptation of fatigue and want of refreshment, and at last falling ill. Remember, it never would have been known but for *that*. These are the obscure heroisms of life, and God's book is full of them, though they pass away from earth like the risen

* Fact.

dew of the morning. Oh! Lorimer, do not say you care for nothing but music and rest.

‘And forgive me, old teacher of my pleasant days of girlhood, when my dear father shared with me the advantage of your companionship, if I am grown bold enough to seem to whisper a lesson in my turn. I miss you daily here. The day does not pass that we do not speak of you, mamma and I,

Yours affectionately,

‘GERTRUDE.’


So wrote and thought the wife of absent Sir Douglas. But what of that? Dowager Clochnaben fiercely denounced her for her many intrigues; the ladies who were merely imitating or following her in active good works, spoke evil of her as they looked through their lists of charity subscriptions; the friends of her ‘pleasant days of girlhood’ either cut her, or made a favour of calling at the house ‘for poor old Lady Charlotte’s sake;’—and THE WORLD, whose opinion, as Richard Clochnaben justly wrote to his brother, was what we ought chiefly to bear in mind,—pronounced that she was a bad woman; that

Lorimer Boyd was her new lover; and that it was a pity a man of so much ability should suffer himself to be cajoled, and his name mixed up with that of a creature more dangerous and subtle than any dancer, or Anonyma, or person belonging to an inferior class; inasmuch as her education and accomplishments (of which she was so inordinately vain) gave her a certain hold over a man accustomed to good society and fastidious as to his choice of companions.

And the more religious and church-going of her acquaintance, especially the more intimate visitors at Clochnaben Castle, and such as had approved the forbidding little Jamie Carmichael to attend school, because he had gathered blackberries on the Sabbath-day,—and those who had been most keen in admiration of Mr. James Frere's sermons; observed to each other that it was 'just a very disgrace and shame to think that such a creature should be permitted to hold her head up in any decent place of resort; and they hoped God would visit her with His righteous judgments, both in this world and the world to come.'

CHAPTER XVI.

Kenneth's Child.

 NEIL'S holidays were come; and Neil himself, bright and beautiful, and active as a roe, was back again in the glens and hills of Glenrossie.

'It's trying to be here without papa!' he had said, the first day; and Gertrude's fortitude was not proof against the gush of sudden tears that burst from her eyes at the speech. But the boy knew nothing; only that his father was 'at the wars,' as Richard Cœur de Lion and many other great heroes had been (including Hannibal), and as his father had frequently been before. Vague, and without much personal anxiety, were Neil's thoughts: for what boy is ever depressed by thoughts of danger? Rather he pitied his mother for her apparent lowness and fear about this glorious profession of arms, and secretly wished

he were old enough to be fighting by his father's side in the distant Crimea—when the fighting should begin.

But gradually some strange uneasy sensation crept into that boyish heart, and lay coiled there like a tiny snake. His mother seemed to get no letters; she was so agitated and eager one day when he himself got one from his father. She was on such odd terms with his Aunt Alice, who, though she withdrew to Clochnaben Castle during the major part of his holidays, yet chose to assert the privilege of residence for a few days at the beginning. During those few days his mother had said she was too ill to dine downstairs. They scarcely spoke. The fiery blood of his passionate race bubbled up in the young breast. He wrote to Sir Douglas:—

‘My mother seems wretchedly ill; she is grown very thin. I thought it was all fright about you; but I think now something worries her. I think Aunt Alice vexes her. If I was sure, I would hate Aunt Alice with all the power of my heart; I beg you to turn her out of the Castle. They say Christians should not hate at all, but whoever vexes my mother would be to me like a murderer

I ought to kill. So you ask her, dearest and best of fathers, what is the matter, and let me know."

Poor Sir Douglas! How in the midst of the snow and dreary scenes of the Crimea, his brow bent and his heart beat over the school-boy letter. His Neil! his Neil;—to whom, 'whoever vexed his mother would be like a murderer whom he ought to kill!' His Neil.

And Neil, in his innocent wrath, made Aunt Alice so uncomfortable with haughty looks and stinging words, on the mere chance and supposition that she was distasteful company for his mother, that she was glad to beat a retreat.

Over the hills to Clochnaben went Alice. And before the servants who were waiting at dinner, as she helped herself to some very hard unripe nectarines grown on the stern wall of the Clochnaben garden, she said she came, 'because it would not have been *proper* for her to remain while that unfortunate woman was permitted these interviews with her son. Of course, if there had been a *daughter*, such a difficulty could never have arisen: she would not have been allowed to see a daughter.'

And the scanty train of servants in the

service of the dowager discussed the matter rigidly, and expressed their horror at the pollution of Glenrossie by Gertrude's return, and the impossibility of 'Miss Alice' remaining in such tainted company.

Only Richard Clochnaben's French valet smiled superior, and said such things were not much thought of in Paris, and that he wondered '*dans ce pays barbare!*' that they were not more civilized.

But there was no doubt of her guilt in the minds of any of the parties so discussing in the servants' hall; any more than in 'the circles of fashion.'

It was in the very midst of Neil's vacation that an event occurred which profoundly impressed him, and caused Gertrude fresh agitation.

He was walking with his mother to the spot where he had given rendezvous to the old keeper, with whom he was to cross the hills to get a little better shooting. For Neil was getting very grand; and talked of good sport, and bad sport, with a beautiful toss of his beardless little chin; and the keeper was wild with admiration of 'siccan a spirity laddie' as his young master.

He was holding his mother's hand, in spite of his sport and his assumption of manliness, when suddenly they heard a little plaintive cry ; and a childish and very plaintive voice said, ' Well, ye needna' beat me, I can get enough of that at home ! ' in a half Scotch, half foreign accent, very peculiar.

Neil leapt through the heather, and down the hollow from whence the sound proceeded, and his mother stood on the rough broken ground above, full of granite stones. A sharp cut with Alice's riding-whip descended on the shoulder of a little girl, as he advanced.

' Get back to your kennel, then,' he heard a voice say, in a tone as sharp as her whip. ' How dare you trespass so far on the border ? Get back to the Mills ! ' and apparently the stroke was about to be repeated, when Neil darted forward, and taking the pony's rein close to the bit, drove it back so as to make it rear on its haunches.

' How dare *you*, Aunt Alice ? ' said he, breathlessly and passionately. ' How dare *you* strike any one here ? '

Alice sat her pony firmly : cowardice was not among her vices.

‘ Oh, yes ; you’d better let her come further still ; you’d better have her up at Glenrossie ! ’ she said, with a bitter sneer.

‘ Why not ? ’ said the boy, as he turned to look at the little girl, who stood softly chafing with one little thin hand the place on her shoulder where she had been struck, and holding flowers close against her dress with the other.

‘ I wanted the white heather ; I didn’t know I wasn’t to climb farther,’ she said ; and then she broke down, and throwing the white heather passionately from her, she burst into tears, and sobbed as if her heart would break ; covering her little pale face with both hands.

The boy’s heart beat hard : he cast a look of fury on Aunt Alice and her pony, and strode towards the pale girl.

Lady Ross also glided towards them. The child uncovered her face as Alice rode away, and looked up with wondering eyes at Gertrude.

‘ Oh ! I know you,’ she said, in a tender tone : ‘ I know you ! I’ve been very lone since you all went. Take me away from them — Oh ! take me away ! ’ And she clutched at the folds of Gertrude’s dress with the little thin white hands.

'*Effie* !' was all Lady Ross could say, and she sat down on the heather brae and wept.

'*Effie* !' said Neil, wonderingly ; and then he smiled. Such a smile of pity, and love, and wonder, as the angels might give.

He had not at first recognised her. She had grown tall and slim, and her face was hidden by the long locks of her soft neglected hair.

'Go, dear Neil, go,' said Lady Ross. 'I will talk to her. I will see her home. You cannot stay ; go with the keeper. I will tell you when I come home. Go, my darling.'

With a wistful lingering look, the boy turned to go—stood still—came back, and said hesitatingly :

'But, mother, if it is *Effie*, mayn't she come with us ?'

'No, my boy,' answered poor Gertrude, in great agitation. 'No. Go now, and I will see you after your shooting.'

And Neil went. But before he turned again to depart, he smiled at *Effie*, and *Effie* returned it with a little trembling sort of moonlight smile of her own ; her long pale chesnut hair held back a little by her taper fingers, as though to make her

vision of him the clearer, and her wide, wild, plaintive eyes fixed on his face.

That look haunted Neil, boy though he was; and he had 'bad sport' that day;—if bad sport consists in missing almost every bird he aimed at.

Gertrude stood silently gazing at the little creature. Memories welled up in her heart, and her eyes filled again with tears.

This was Kenneth's poor little girl, Kenneth's only child, Effie! Poor little lone deserted Effie.

'Oh, take me home with you to Glenrossie!' repeated the pleading voice; 'they beat me so, and I am so lone.'

'Why do they beat you, dear?'

'They beat me for everything. If I'm not quick, and if I'm tired, and if I don't find eggs, and if I'm frightened in the night.'

'What frightens you in the night, my child?' And Gertrude drew the little trembling creature to her, and sat down with her in the long heather.

The child leaned up against her bosom and clung to her.

'I don't know. I'm scared. They told me

if I did anything wrong, the BLACK DOUGLAS should come in the night and take me — tall, oh, so tall! and tramping through the heather, with only bones for his feet.'

And the child shuddered, and pressed closer to Gertrude.

'Has he ever come?'

'No!' said the little girl, with a sudden look of wonder.

'No, Effie, nor ever will come: it's a story, —an ignorant, foolish story. There is no such thing! Do you think God would let a poor little child be tormented by such a shocking thing when she did not mean to do wrong? Do you say your prayers, Effie?'

'Oh, yes!'

'When?'

'In the morning I say them on my knees, and in the night I say some with my head under the bedclothes.'

'Do you think there are two Gods, Effie? One for the day and another for the night.'

'No; one God—one God!' said the child, faltering.

'Are you afraid in the day?'

‘No! Oh no!’ said the little girl with a wild smile. ‘I see the birds, and the deer, and the waking things, and the blue in the sky, and I’m not afraid at all.’

‘Then do you think the God who watches in the day forsakes the world at night, Effie? forsakes all His creatures asleep—for it is not only you, you know, Effie, who lie sleeping, but all those you have named—the poor little birds in their nests, and the shy deer among the fern, and the fish in the smooth lake: do you think as soon as DARK comes He gives them all over to be tormented and scared?’

The child was silent.

‘Effie, God is a good and merciful God, and He watches the night as He watches the day, and you are as safe in the dark under His care as in this bright, cloudless day. He is all mercy and all goodness.’

Children startle their elders sometimes by questions too profound for answer. Effie gave a deep shivering sigh, and said in a tone of grave reflection,—

‘Then why did He let me *be*?’

‘What do you mean, Effie?’

‘Why, if He is merciful and good, does He let me be in the world at all? Nobody cares for me, nobody wants me, and I don’t want to be here; but God puts me here. Oh! If I were but away in heaven!’ and she lifted her eyes with miserable yearning to the blue sky. ‘I’m a scrap of a creature, and it’s seldom I feel well; I’ve a pain almost always in my side, and that’s what makes me slow, and then they beat me; and there’s such strong, happy children die: a good many have died since you were here, Lady Ross, and I go and look at their graves in the burial-ground on Sundays; and that’s when I, say to myself, Why should I *be* at all?’

‘Effie, it is God’s will that we should be — all of us; and be sure that He has some task for us to do, or He would not put us here. But He does not torment us. Promise me if you wake in the night to think of that, and to think of me, and to think that we are sitting here in the sunshine, talking of His goodness.’

‘I’ll try; but oh! in the night I’ll be scared with the thought of the Black Douglas!’

‘No, my child. Think of me, not of the Black Douglas, and say this little rhyme:—

“ Lord, I lay me down to sleep !
Do Thou my soul in mercy keep ;
And if I die before I wake,
Do Thou my soul in mercy take.”

That rhyme, Effie, was told me by a wise clever man, who always said it from the day when he was a little child, and you must always say it all your life long for love of me.’

‘ Oh ! I *do* love you,’ said the pallid creature, creeping close, as though she would creep into her very heart. ‘ I do love you, and please take me home with you.’

‘ I cannot, Effie,’ said Gertrude, sadly. ‘ And now I must go my way, and you must go yours. Good-bye.’

‘ Won’t you come with me never so little on the way ?’

Gertrude looked down on the large pleading eyes moist with tears. She took the slight form in her arms and wept.

‘ Some day, little Effie, some day, perhaps, we may be all together ; but not now, not now ! God bless and protect you ! God bless you !’

And so saying, and weeping still, Lady Ross turned to go homewards. She paused at a turn

on the hills, and looked back. The little creature had sat wearily down, her hands clasped round her slim knees, looking out with her large sad eyes at the light of the declining day.

Was she again thinking, 'Why should I *be*?'
Kenneth's deserted child?

CHAPTER XVII.

How Effie was Gladdened.

THE mystery of Effie not being allowed to return with them, troubled Neil more than all that had disturbed him before; and his disquieted soul was none the more composed when his mother, clasping both her arms round him, and leaning her head on his breast, gave the faltering explanation, 'Your cousin Kenneth has displeased your father, very much, and he would not wish Effie to be at the castle.'

'Oh, every one says Cousin Kenneth is not a good man, and he gets drunk, and all that,' replied Neil; 'but what has EFFIE done?'

And the boy roamed up and down, and watched for the little face, pale almost as the white heather she had come to seek; but she had vanished away from the near landscape, and into

the distance he was forbidden to follow her. And so the holidays ended.

Once only had Gertrude herself attempted further intercourse with the banished child. It was but a few days after their discourse about her terrors by night, and Gertrude's tender heart was haunted by the memory of the pleading eyes. She thought she would brave the pain for herself, and go and see Maggie, at the New Mill, as they called the place Old Sir Douglas had allotted them, and there speak to her of the fragile flower left to her rough guidance.

But Maggie's ignorant wrath was roused by the very sight of Gertrude. Fixed was her notion, that if Gertrude had wedded with her son all would have gone well. Gertrude had blighted all their lives. As to Effie, she sullenly defended her own right to manage her which way she pleased. She was 'her ain bairn, and bairns maun be trained and taught.' She'd been 'beat hersel' when she was a bairn, and was 'never a pin the waur—maybe the better.' And as the meek low voice of Gertrude pleaded on, Maggie seemed roused to positive exasperation, and burst out at last, 'Lord's sake, Lady Ross,

will ye no gie ower? Ye'll just gar me beat her double, to quiet my heart. Gang back to yere ain bairn, and leave Effie to me. It's little gude ye can be till her, noo that ye've ruined her fayther, and thrawn me amaist daft, wi' yere fashious doin's. Gang awa' wi' ye! Gang awa !'

And suiting the action to the word, Maggie waved her tempestuous white arms angrily in the air, much in the same manner as if she had desired to chase a flock of turkeys from her poultry-yard; and, turning with a sudden flounce into the house, and perceiving Effie leaning in the doorway, she administered a resounding slap on the delicate shoulder; for no particular reason that could be guessed, unless, according to her own phrase, it was 'to quiet her heart.'

It was some time before Gertrude saw Kenneth's child again; and even then it was but a chance interview, which gave her an opportunity of judging the effect of Maggie's education on her mind, and of the lapse of time upon her beauty.

Slimmer, taller, more graceful than ever—her large eyes seeming larger still from a sort

of sick hollowness in her cheek—Effie came swiftly up to her as she stood one day gazing at the Hut, waiting for Neil, but dreaming of other times. How altered Effie seemed!

Neil, too, had altered. He was beginning to be quite a tall youth; and his bold bright brow had a look of angry sadness on it; for do what they would, his keen soul had ferreted out the existence of some painful secret; and, driven by his mother's silence to perpetual endeavours to discover for himself what had occurred in his family, he heard at last from Ailie's adder tongue the sharp sentence—'Good gracious, boy, do ye not know that your father and mother have quarrelled and parted?'

Quarrelled and parted! His idolized father: his angel mother!

Still, not taking in the full measure of misfortune, he answered fiercely, 'If they've quarrelled, Aunt Alice, it is that *you've* made mischief: I'm certain of that.'

'You'd better ask your mother whether that's it,' sneered Alice, and whisked away from him to her tower-room.

But Neil would not ask his mother. Only he

kissed her with more fervent tenderness that night, and held her hand in his, and looked into her eyes, and ruminated on what should be done to any one who harmed a hair of that precious mother's lovely head; and from that hour he doubled his obedience and submission to her will, watching the very slightest of her inclinations or fancies about him, and forestalling, when he could, every wish she seemed to form.

And he prayed—that young lad—oh! how fervently he prayed, in his own room, by many a clear moonlight and murky midnight, that God would bless his mother, and that if—IF Aunt Ailie spoke the truth, God would reconcile those dear parents, and bring back joy again to their household.

But to his mother he said nothing.

And when she stood by the Hut that day thinking of him, thinking of all the past,—that darkest of shadows, the knowledge that *he* knew there was some quarrel between his parents—had not passed over her heart.

Standing there, then, in her mood of thoughtful melancholy, her soul far away in the dismal camp by the Black Sea—in the tents of men who were

friends and comrades of the husband who had renounced her—the light flitting forwards of Effie was not at first perceived.

But the young girl laid her little hand on the startled arm, and whispered breathlessly—‘Oh, forgive my coming! but such joy has happened to me; I wanted so sore to tell you! I’ve rowed across the lake in the coble alone, just to say to you the words of the song, “*He’s comin’ again.*” Papa’s coming! He’s to be back directly, and I’m to go from the New Mill to Torrieburn! Oh! I could dance for joy! I’ll not be frightened when I sleep under the same roof again with papa. It’s all joy, joy, joy, now,—for ever!’

CHAPTER XVIII.

Kenneth comes Back.

BUT it was not joy. Kenneth returned a drunken wreck; overwhelmed with debts he had no means of discharging; baffled and laughed at by the Spanish wife he had no means of controlling or punishing; ruined in health by systematic and habitual intemperance. He seemed, even to his anxious little daughter, a strange frightful vision of his former self. His handsome face was either flushed with the purple and unwholesome flush of extreme excess, or pallid almost to death with exhaustion. He wept for slight emotion; he raved and swore on slight provocation; he fainted and sank after slight fatigue. He was a ruined man! The first, second, and third consultation on the subject of his affairs only confirmed the lawyer's and agent's opinion that he

must sell Torrieburn, if he desired to live on any income, or pay a single debt.

Sell Torrieburn! It was a bitter pill to swallow; but it must be taken. Torrieburn was advertised. Torrieburn was to be disposed of by 'public roup.'

The morning of that disastrous day Kenneth was saved from much pain by being partially unconscious of the business that was transacting. He had been drinking for days, and when that day—that fatal day—dawned, he was still sitting in his chair, never having been to bed all night, his hair tangled and matted, his eyes bloodshot, his face as pale as ashes.

With a gloomy effort at recollection, he looked round at Effie, who was crouched in a corner of the room watching him, like a young fawn among the bracken.

'Do you remember what day it is, child?' he said, in a harsh, hoarse voice.

'Oh, papa!' said the little maiden, 'do not think of sorrowful things. Come away; come out over the hills, and think no more of what is to happen here. Come away.'

To the last, in spite of all his foul offences

against that generous heart, Kenneth had somehow dreamed he would be rescued at the worst by his uncle. He was not rescued. But at the eleventh hour there came an order from Sir Douglas that Torrieburn was to be bought in—bought at the extreme price that might be bid for it, and settled on Kenneth's daughter and her heirs by entail.

'Come away!' said the plaintive young voice, and Kenneth left the house that had been his own and his father's, and went out a stripped and homeless man over the hills. His head did not get better: it got worse. He swayed to and fro as he climbed the hills; he pressed onward with the gait of a staggering, drunken, delirious wretch, as he was. He looked back from the hill, at Torrieburn smiling in the late autumnal sun, and wept, as Boabdil wept when he looked back at the fair lost city of Granada!

No taunting voice upbraided his tears; no proud virago spoke, like Boabdil's mother, of the weakness that had wrecked him, or the folly that made all irrecoverable loss, irrecoverable despair.

The gentle child of his reckless marriage followed with her light footsteps as he strode still upwards and upwards. Panting and weary, she

crouched by his side when at length he flung himself, face downwards, on the earth. The slender little fingers touched his hot forehead with their pitying touch. The small cool lips pressed his burning cheek and hot eyelids with tiny kisses of consolation.

‘Oh! Papa, come home again, or come to the New Mill; to Grandmamma Maggie! You are tired; you are cold; don’t stay here on the hills; come to the New Mill; come!’

But Kenneth heeded her not. With a wild delirious laugh, he spoke and muttered to himself: sang, shouted, and blasphemed; blasphemed, shouted, and sang.

The little girl looked despairingly around her, as the cold mist settled on the fading mountains, clothing all in a ghost-like veil. ‘Come away, Papa!’ was still her vain earnest cry. ‘Come away, and sit by the good fire at the New Mill. Don’t stay here!’

In vain! The mist grew thicker and yet more chill; but Kenneth sat rocking himself backwards and forwards, taking from time to time long draughts from his whisky-flask, and singing defiant snatches of songs he had sung with boon-

companions long ago. At length he seemed to get weary : weary, and drowsy ; and Effie, fainting with fatigue, laid her poor little dishevelled head down on his breast, and sank into a comfortless slumber.

Both lay resting on the shelterless hill ; that drunken wretched man, and the innocent girl-child. And the pale moon struggled through the mist, and tinged the faces of the sleepers with a yet more pallid light.

So they lay till morning ; and when morning broke, the mist was thicker yet on lake and mountain. You could not have seen through its icy veil, no, not the distance of a few inches.

Effie woke, chilled to the very marrow of her bones.

Her weak voice echoed the tones of the night before, with tearful earnestness.

‘ Oh, Papa, come home ! or come to the good fire burning at the New Mill. Oh, Papa, come home—come home ! ’

As she passionately reiterated the request, she once more pressed her fervent lips to the sleeping drunkard’s cheek.

What vague terror was it, that thrilled her

soul at that familiar contact? What was there, in the stiff, half-open mouth,—the eyes that saw no light,—the ear that heard no sound,—which, even to that innocent creature who had never seen death, spoke of its unknown mystery, and paralysed her soul with fear?

A wild cry—such as might be given by a wounded animal—burst from Effie's throat; and she turned to flee from the half-understood dread, to seek assistance for her father,—her arms outspread before her,—plunging through the mist, down the hill they had toiled to ascend the night before. As she staggered forward through the thick cold cloud, she was conscious of the approach of something, meeting her; panting heavily, as she was herself breathing; struggling upwards, as she was struggling downwards; it might be a hind—or a wild stag—or a human being—but at all events it was LIFE, and behind was DEATH,—so Effie still plunged on!

She met the ascending form; her faint eyes saw, as in a holy vision, the earnest beautiful face of Neil, strained with wonder and excitement; and with a repetition of the wild cry she had before given, she sank into his suddenly clasp-

ing arms in a deadly swoon of exhaustion and terror.

The keeper was with Neil. He found Kenneth where he lay; lifted the handsome head, and looked in the glazed eye.

‘Gang hame, sir, and send assistance,’ was all he said. ‘Will I help ye to carry wee Missie?’

‘No—no. No,’ exclaimed Neil, as he wound his strenuous young arms round the slender fairy form of his wretched little cousin. ‘Trust me, I’ll get Effie safe down to Torrieburn, and I’ll send men up to help Cousin Kenneth to come down too. Is he very drunk?’

‘Gude save us, sir; ye’ll need to send twa “stout hearts for a stour brae,” for I’m thinking Mr. Kenneth’s seen the last o’ the hills. Ye’ll just need to send men to fetch THE BODY.’

And with this dreadful sentence knelling in his ears, Neil made his way as best he could, with lithe activity, down the well-known slopes of the mountain; clasping ever closer and closer to his boyish breast, the light figure with long damp dishevelled hair, of his poor little cousin Effie.

CHAPTER XIX.

Through the Mist.

STRENUOUS and eager as Neil was, his boyish strength had its limit, and the agitation of his mind probably hastened the moment when he felt compelled to pause, and deposit his burden on the heather. Effie was no longer a dead weight. She had moved and moaned, clung for an instant, more tightly than seemed possible with such fragile arms, to her cousin, and then made a sudden struggle to be released, murmuring in a bewildered way, 'Oh, what is this? I can walk, I can walk!'

She staggered a step or two, and leaned heavily back on his protecting arm.

'Rest, dear Effie, rest,' whispered Neil, and he folded and flung his plaid down on the hill, dank with mist and the dews of morning, and

softly lowered her to that resting-place. But, as consciousness returned, grief and horror woke anew in Effie's breast. Her poor little pale face grew wild and strange. She stared at Neil with eyes that seemed to him to dilate as they gazed. Then she burst into tears; such tears as Neil had never seen shed in his life, for he had neither known and suffered grief himself, nor witnessed it in others. The calm sadness of his mother was a familiar pain to his loving nature; but this,—this dreadful weeping,—this young thing dissolved in showers of tears, and shaken by sobs, and wringing those slender hands, and wildly looking through the mist to the unseen sky, calling on God for help—was strange and dreadful to him. What was he to do with her? What could he do?

She wept, she rocked herself backward and forward, like a reed when the storm sweeps over the loch. 'Oh, papa! oh, papa! oh, my own father! Oh, to think I shall never, never hear his voice any more! And he said such dreadful things—things to make God so angry! Oh, such things he said, and such dreadful songs he sang—on the hill—in the night. Oh, my poor father!

my miserable father! oh, dreadful, dreadful things! Oh, God forgive those songs, and all the words he said! He was ill—he did not know. Oh, Neil, cousin Neil, do you think God will forgive?—the terrible God! Oh, my father! I hear him—I hear him singing still! But no, never again! never again! I shall never hear him again! Those dreadful words are the last, the last, the last!’

And the weeping grew more convulsive; and the young heart that beat in Neil’s breast seemed as if it would burst for very pity. ‘My mother shall take you,’ he faltered out, as the only comfort he could think of. Then, as he looked despairingly round at the wild plants on the wild hill where those two young creatures sat in that chill mist of morning, he suddenly pressed her little shuddering fingers in his warm eager grasp.

‘Effie,’ he said, ‘oh, Effie, try and listen. I cannot tell why it should come to me now—I have not thought of it for years—the memory of a little tradition my mother told me, long, long ago, when I was a child. It was a rider, a bad wild man, a robber, I think, who was careering

over ground like this, rough, full of granite stones and slippery places, and his horse threw him; pitched him right overhead; and all that those who ran to help him heard, was a frantic curse and a groan; and then silence, for he was dead. But when they came near the place, there was a strange plant grown there, a tall thistle with variegated leaves streaked with white, and upon the leaf, in irregular characters, these lines were traced :—

“ Betwixt the stirrup and the ground
Mercy was sought—and mercy found ! ”

My dear Effie, the story is a wild fable, but God's endless mercy is no fable. Moments to Him may be years of ours, as years of ours are but seconds to Him. He knows the thoughts that would have changed all the heart. He knows if the dying would have lived a better life, and lived to serve Him. He knows,—oh, Effie, are you weeping still so bitterly; will nothing comfort you?’

‘Oh, my father, my father! The dreadful, dreadful words!’ sobbed Effie. ‘The dreadful, dreadful night! Oh, my heart is broken; my heart is all dark,—for ever and ever and ever!’

As she spoke, as she sobbed, as she rocked to and fro, suddenly the mist lifted; the unequalled loveliness of that sight, only visible in the Highlands and among similar mountain scenery, burst on the gaze of the anxious lad, and the desolate girl by his side. The golden glory of sunrise broke over and under the floating clouds; the leaden lake turned blue, and rippled with silver lines; the far-off falls of Torrieburn, the white speck of its dwelling-house, the lovely towers of Glenrossie, and even the grim grey visionary rocks of Clochnaben, all caught a share of the tinging rays; and Neil's beautiful face—as he turned in wonder and admiration to this opening of the golden gates of morning—brightened with a rosy flush, half of emotion and half of the reflected light, and never looked more beautiful. Even Effie ceased to weep. A strange awe conquered sorrow for the moment. The large wild eyes, with their arrested tears sparkling on her pallid cheek, looked also at that wondrous glory of Nature,—at the rolling veil of mist and the breaks of light under,—at the warmth and life that were stealing into the cold night-saddened scenery, and changing all as in a vision.

‘Oh!’ she said, ‘it is as if we saw it all from another world! Light has come.’

‘Yes, Effie,’ said her cousin, as he slowly turned from the radiance and fixed his earnest gaze on her face, ‘light *has* come; and so also mercy will come. “Post tenebras, lux;”—after the darkness, light! Doubt all the worth and goodness of man: doubt all things on earth; but never doubt the mercy of God in heaven, for that is *SURE*.’

And as he spoke, they both rose, and struggled down the precipitous sides of the hill hand in hand, or Effie’s steps supported in difficult places by Neil’s arm; till, weary, bewildered, exhausted, but with a sense of protection and consolation hovering round her, she reached at length the house of Torrieburn.

The two cousins waited there together—oh, awful waiting!—for the return of that senseless weight which had gone forth a living man—for the return of those sent to seek the poor sinner who had passed away in the blank night singing blasphemous drunken songs on the hill-side—for Kenneth; no longer master of Torrieburn; no longer grieved, or glad, or offending, or suffering,

or existent among men—for the solemn coming of the strong-limbed Highlanders, who had gone to aid the keeper in the carrying home of ‘THE BODY.’

CHAPTER XX.

The boundless Mercy of God.

BUT when those strong men came,—with heavy, even, dreadful tread,—the burden that they bore was not a corpse ! The doctor met them on the threshold, and Neil met them there ; while Effie sat cowering in an inner chamber, feeling as if she had but one sense left—the sense of hearing, and that the beating in her ears disturbed even that.

The doctor met those men, and helped to lay their burden on a bed ; and watched, and studied, and examined, and spoke in an under-voice to the old keeper, and kept silence for a little while, and watched again with downcast eyes ; and held Kenneth's clay-cold hand, and laid his own on Kenneth's heart. And then he spoke to Neil.

Neil heard, and gave a short wild cry, in his excitement, in his gladness, and rushed to that miserable room where slender Effie sat despairing and listening.

And innocently, in his boyish exultation of better news, he took that little dishevelled head and drew it to his bosom, and kissed it as he pressed her fondly to his breast—kissed it on the shining hair, and on the white smooth forehead, buried as the pale face was on his beating heart.

For Kenneth was not dead ! He might live, or he might die ; there was congestion of the brain, and danger, and horror, and all evil chances possible. But he was not dead !

‘Effie, your father is not dead !’ So spoke young Neil ; and Effie, after the first throb of bewildered surprise, heard him and blessed him, and flew to that father’s side whom she had so dreaded to see again ; and smiled wild smiles at those Highland bearers ; and flung herself into the old keeper’s arms, and kissed his face and horny hairy hands, and called down God’s blessing ‘on him and his ;’ and wept and smiled again, and kissed him again, till the old keeper wept too, and called her a ‘daft lassie,’ and lifted

his bonnet from his honest pious brow, thanking Almighty God for His 'special mercy that day.'

That day; ay, and that night.

For in the dead of night—the third night—Kenneth awoke; awoke from his senseless slumber, and his heavy half life. He looked around him at visible objects: a dim light lit the room.

The hired village nurse who was there to wait upon him, had sunk into a midnight sleep. Her wrinkled face—seamed with lines of care from obscure sorrows unknown to those who employed her—was sealed in that deep fatigued slumber which nothing short of the cry of 'Fire!' or some equivalent event, could be expected to disturb. She was not watching: she was dreaming of watches more dear, more intimate, more sorrowful. She was dreaming of her own dear ones, her own lost ones, before she came to watch strangers for hire; withered and weary, and buried in sleep.

And another sleeper was there—Maggie! Maggie, who had been sent to in all haste, and had returned in wild hurry with the messenger. For she had kept her word well, had Maggie. Kenneth, imperious, insolent, oppressive to her old doited father, had been an exile from her

heart. She had not seen his once-loved face for many a day; she had stayed, as she said she would stay, with her parents.

But Kenneth ill and dying in the cold mist on the hill-side, Kenneth suffering and ruined and alone, was once more suddenly her idol and treasure, 'her ain bairn and bonny king o' men.' She was ignorant, erring, homely: but love is grand, and holy, and divine; and mother's love, as it is the first, so also in its intensity is it the strongest upon earth. Lovely as is the scriptural promise of complete union between truly-knitted husband and wife—'they twain shall be one flesh'—a higher comparison yet waits on mother's love. No fleshly union is spoken of there, but it is made akin to, and one with, the eternal Spirit of God: 'As a mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.' Inspiration itself could give no more perfect image of love divine.

Maggie, then, was there to nurse and comfort Kenneth; cradle-love was with the man forsaken by his untrue Spanish wife, and by the careless friends of dissolute hours; cradle-kisses were once more showered on his brow, and cheek, and pale swollen lips. And even now, though animal

nature preponderated in poor Maggie, and the anxiety of her soul failed to keep her body waking, there was something intensely fond and maternal in the attitude of her leaning head with its rich masses of golden hair, (scarcely yet dimmed with streaks of grey,) and the large white arms and clasping hands stretched, even in slumber, across the pillows that supported the unconscious form of her Absalom.

She slept, and the nurse slept—heavily, profoundly.

But there was one sleepless watcher in that room. Effie had been put to bed; Maggie herself had assisted in that ceremony; had first boxed her weary ears for weeping and wishing to stay up, and had then sat down on the narrow bed and wept with her, loudly and grievously; till Effie had almost felt the new mystery of jealousy creep into her soul, as she had felt the new mystery of Death,—at the evidence of a love for her father whose passion was so like her own.

And in the silent watches of the night, when the dim light was burning and gleaming down on those other sleepers, and no sound but their heavy breathing made life in the room, Effie

glided from her inner chamber, and stood, pale and sad and slender, in her white night-dress, by Kenneth's bedside.

Then it was that, as he opened his eyes conscious of outward sight and sounds, he saw her, like a white angel, ascend and lightly kneel upon his bed; facing him, but with eyes upturned to Heaven, while the fervent sorrowful tender voice sounded in his ears, speaking brief sentences broken by repressed sobs. 'O God! dear God! let me be lonesome always,—or let me die in pain, great wretched pain,—but let papa live, and be a good man,—let papa live, and let me die instead. Amen.'

Such were the words that greeted Kenneth, or seemed to greet him, in the dreamy night. Sweet mournful voice—sweet little mournful face! Is it a vision or reality that haunts him now?

It is reality, Kenneth—it is your own poor child—your young helpless daughter, praying thus to the God of judgment, the God of mercy.

All of a sudden, as comes a flash of irradiating light, there came to Kenneth's soul a consciousness unknown before. This was, indeed, his child

—his own flesh and blood and spirit; part of himself; the better, the more innocent, part of himself. And she was praying; praying—not for herself, not for blessings to her own life, but for HIM. Willing to die, to suffer, to be in ‘wretched pain,’ for *his* sake; to save *him*; to rescue *him* from some unknown evil; from the wrath of a terrible God!

With a feeble hollow voice, in the depth and darkness of night, Kenneth called to his child: ‘Effie, my little Effie, is it you?’

‘Oh, papa, oh, my blessed and beloved papa, yes! Oh, father, yes, it is I! I am here.’

Then Kenneth said, with a ‘groan,’ ‘Pray for me, Effie—I dare not pray for myself.’

‘Pray for me.’ Who shall doubt that God permits children to be our angels on earth? ‘I say to you, that *their* angels do always behold the face of our Father which is in heaven.’ ALWAYS. Not in vague glimpses, as to our baser and more clay-loaded natures, but always. Oh, blessed privilege, of dwelling in the light that never is withdrawn!

So in the murky night, while the nurse and poor Maggie slept, God’s angels woke; and the

slender child, dawning towards womanhood, woke also, and prayed for her wretched father.

And it seemed to Kenneth as if scales fell from his eyes while she prayed. His selfishness; his insolent insubordination; his sinful passion for Gertrude; his want of tenderness and pity to his poor mother the ignorant loving Maggie, with all her faults and all her virtues; his ceaseless ingratitude to his uncle; the awful memory of that dim drunken morning when his parricidal hand might have committed murder; all smote and stabbed him to the heart sharply as a two-edged sword! God's mercy was dealing with him; God visited him, and spoke to him with that mysterious voice, heard by the first sinners in Paradise 'walking in the garden in the cool of day.'

And in that midnight hour, on the wings of that child's prayer, the repentance of Kenneth went up to Heaven!

'Have mercy, Lord, and create a new spirit within me,' was all poor Kenneth said, for he was unused to pray. But God asks not for human eloquence. The publican who smote on his breast with the brief petition, 'God be merciful to me a sinner,' went down to his house

justified rather than the other. 'God forgive me,' was *this* sinner's murmured supplication. 'God have pity on my dear, dear father,' was Effie's simple reiteration of yearning petition.

Did the angels hear and bear it to the foot of the Almighty throne?—Assuredly they did. And in the morning Kenneth lay sad, and weak, but sensible, with his little Effie by him; and he scrupled not to own to that devoted child that he felt as if he had been blind all his life; and that suddenly God had healed him, and caused him to see, the selfish, sinful, strangely rebellious course which he had taken continually in the bygone years.

So Kenneth repented! In feebleness, bitterness, sickness, and humility, never to be the same man again; but with a deep and true repentance, abjectly sincere. There are resurrections on earth, other than the one which leads from death to immortality. There are illustrations of God's beautiful emblem of divine change in the bursting of the dull chrysalid case to let the winged Psyche forth, other than the one illustration of confined clay, from which the imprisoned soul escapes and ascends to glory.

The *lesser* resurrections, of our world, are daily

round us. Memories of good ; and words of forgotten prayers ; and voices of friends neglected ; and lessons of life from which we turned impatiently, as children from dry tasks — these all may rise again ; in no spectral light, but clad with a saintly halo ! Rise,—like the fountain in the desert that quenched the thirst of perishing Ishmael when all around seemed but barren sand ; rise,—as the good thought rose in the dissolute prodigal's heart while he fed the foul swine despairing ; turning our steps back, like his, into that long-forsaken track of peace, which shall lead at last to our Father's mercy and the eternal pardon.

‘ God has given me the treasure I least deserved,’ Kenneth said, as he lay with one weak hand locked in his mother's, and the other caressingly folding his daughter's head to his cheek ; ‘ I have this good dear child ; and I was such a bad son to you, mother ! ’

And poor Maggie's wide blue eyes opening in mingled amazement, pity, and passionate affection, she answered in a sort of confused rapture, ‘ Ou ! Kenneth, my lad, I loo ye mair than if ye'd been the best son to me that iver lived ; but

I'll loo ye mair and mair, noo that ye're sae sick and sorry.'

And sick and sorry Kenneth continued for a long time. It was not to be expected that such a shock, to an already broken constitution, should pass and leave no traces. He spoke with difficulty; walked with difficulty; a general and unnatural feebleness such as is often the forerunner of paralysis, deadened his faculties. He leaned heavily on Effie (who loved to be so leaned upon), and told her, with a smile, she was his 'live walking-stick.' He sat mute and unoccupied; looking out into space, into vacancy; he was no longer the Kenneth they had known, but another Kenneth altogether.

Dear, inexpressibly dear to them! They judged him not; they blamed him not; they desired only to serve and tend him. Effie's wistful eyes followed and rested on him as a dog watches for his master; and in all the little household cares and medical appliances that fell to her lot to perform, she 'did her spiriting gently' as Ariel in the island of storms before the wand of Prospero was broken.

CHAPTER XXI.

Gertrude has a New Trouble.

WHEN Neil narrated to his mother the events of that agitated morning, he was amazed that she did not express her intention of instantly going to Torrieburn to tend and comfort Effie: amazed and disappointed.

‘Whatever Kenneth may have done to anger my father, poor dear Effie cannot have offended him! Indeed, the Torrieburn agent told me of his generous intentions, that in buying Torrieburn it should be settled on Effie: why then can you not go to her? Oh, mother, she is so forlorn and miserable!’

Gertrude wept.

‘My boy,’ she said, ‘you cannot think I do not pity Effie. You shall write to your father what has happened. When he knows—when he hears ——’

She paused, choked with painful emotion.

‘When he knows and hears, mother,’ said Neil, hotly, ‘he will wonder that all from this house have not gone to Effie in her distress.

‘Forgive me, forgive me, my own dearest mother!’ he suddenly added, as his mother leaned back with closed eyes, through the lids of which the tears she tried to check were stealing.

But he was restless and unsatisfied. He withdrew to a distant window, in the sunny morning-room, and took up a book and tried to read. Then suddenly he tossed the book from him, and looked wistfully from the window in the direction of Torrieburn.

‘When I am a man,’ he said,—in a proud, resolved tone, so like the voice of Old Sir Douglas that it thrilled through his mother’s brain,—‘when I am a man, I will *marry* my Cousin Effie, and take her away from all this misery; I have determined on that.’

‘God forbid!’ exclaimed Gertrude; and her startled gaze was fixed on her son, as if measuring the interval between herself and that new trial.

‘When I am a man.’ The tall, lithe, hand-

some lad who had carried his cousin across the moors, and now stood in such an attitude of proud independence, stating his premature determination as to the most serious matter that can affect human existence! The onward years, how near they seemed while she gazed on him.

‘When I am a man!’ The waters of Marah flowed over the soul of his mother. A new strange visionary perception seemed given to her,—of a future in which some other love should be beyond and above *her* love in her son’s heart, and be thwarted on her account, for some fault which she was supposed to have committed. Her Neil’s heart perhaps following his strong boyish fancy and breaking with grief: for how could Sir Douglas ever agree to a marriage between his son and Kenneth’s daughter? And therefore Gertrude exclaimed, ‘God forbid!’ with more passion than she generally spoke.

And it really seemed as if the new misery was dawning from that moment; for Neil’s lovely indignant eyes flashed through something very like tears, and his lips trembled as he hastily answered, ‘Mother, I did not think you could be so cruel! Whatever Uncle Kenneth has done

(and of course I see that you also have quarrelled with him, as well as my father), that dear girl can have sinned against no one. She has no mother to comfort her; no lady friend; nothing but Mrs. Ross-Heaton. Oh! poor Effie,—poor cousin; if you could have seen her coming down the hill—if you could have seen her pale, pale face and ruffled damp hair, and damp clothes, in which she had lain on the hill all night! Oh! I must go and see how she is this evening,’ continued he, excitedly; ‘I must go. I did so hope you would have come. I thought we should have gone together. I *must* see Effie! I must! I will not be longer away than I can help.’

And the passionate scion of a passionate race opened the door of the morning-room hurriedly as he spoke; held the lock in his hand a moment, looking wistfully back, as though he half expected his mother to change her mind; and then, closing it hastily, ran downstairs, and out over the hill. Over the boundary-line of Glenrossie, where the white heather grew which Effie had sought, the day his detested Aunt Ailie had struck at her with the little sharp riding-whip: (he saw it now, flickering a moment in the air, like a snake’s

tongue, and then coming down so viciously on the thin white shoulder and slender arm!) Over that boundary, into the lands of Torrieburn, and on to the Falls, and past the Falls, to the house; and into the sick chamber where Effie watched. Pale weary Cousin Effie; with her small white hands tightly clasped together in her lap, in a sort of agony of uncertainty and anxiety.

He looked at Kenneth and sat down by her —by the bedside. She answered in the lowest whisper his whispered greeting, and then those two sat silent, hand-in-hand, for a while, both looking only at the face of the sick man.

Then, when the time for parting came, Neil motioned her to follow him to the outer door, and spoke in his own earnest voice, unrestrained by the necessary quiet of that painful sick-room.

‘Effie, dear, you look paler than ever: take care of yourself; eat and drink, and strive to be strong. You know you cannot nurse your father, or help in any way, if you fall ill yourself. And you will be ill—I am sure you will—if you don’t take care.’

And the young radiant eyes anxiously perused the face of the tender girl, and the young heart

sighed; still thinking his mother should be there.

‘I will come every day, Effie,’ he resumed; ‘every morning and every evening. Expect me: I will never fail. I shall have no thought but you, till I see you better.’

‘Oh! do come,’ said the young girl, faintly. ‘It helps me so. The morning I do well enough, but the evenings will be so eerie; and I dare not make it light enough to read, for the doctor says all should be so dark and still.’

‘I’ll come, Effie.’

And with the firm quick words, he stepped lightly from the threshold, and trod with a firm quick step the distance that lay between her home and his! *Her* home for ever! He was glad of that. He loved his father for having thought of that. It was noble, generous, like his father. He comprehended, he knew, how hopeless the helping of Kenneth had been; it was the common gossip of the old keeper and others in the place. Neil could not choose but know it: and bad Kenneth had justly forfeited all right to his estate. But it was a beautiful thought of his father, to forego the possession of Torrieburn, to


buy it, and settle it on the ruined man's only child. Ah, what could be the quarrel between Glenrossie and Torrieburn, bitter enough to divide them so? What could make his mother keep aloof from innocent Effie? What?

That mother sat buried in mournful thought, till his return. The evening meal passed away untasted: the book which had been occupying her was unread: and, when Neil's fond good-night kiss was accompanied by a murmured prayer for pardon 'if he had spoken hastily before he went out,' she shook her head, and returned the kiss with passionate tenderness; but there was no explanation between them.

And, as every morning Neil went out with more restless impatience, a little earlier than the day before to Torrieburn, and every evening returned a little later, feeding his lingering eyes on Effie's farewell smile, as she stood like a small white statue under the dark fir-trees—Gertrude's sadness deepened more and more; and she wrote a cheerless, anxious letter to Lorimer Boyd, telling him how it was with them all, and her grievous perplexity of heart.

CHAPTER XXII.

Lorimer Writes about Kenneth.

ORIMER BOYD'S answer—to adopt the foreign phraseology of the Earl his brother—‘ne se fit pas attendre.’ He wrote by return of of post. ‘Take the boy instantly away from Scotland,’ he said. ‘Even if it was understood between you and Douglas (which I cannot see) that he was always to spend his holidays at Glen-rossie, and that your enjoyment of his society was limited to meeting him there, the peculiar circumstances would justify you in making some different arrangement. Take him away instantly. He is not so young but this fancy may give you more trouble than you can foresee. Part him and that poor child, in mercy to both ; and in pity to yourself. I can see that you are ill, in every line of your letter. Leave Scotland ; go somewhere

to the sea-side, and let dear Neil sail and boat about, during the remainder of his holidays. I have written to Lady Charlotte. I hope she will forgive my frightening her a little about you.

‘Neil’s account of Kenneth may be quite correct, but I very much mistrust it. I don’t wish to speak ill of my countrymen, but I never yet saw a remorseful Scotchman, or a penitent Scotchwoman. The Caledonian mind takes quite a different view of the condition of souls (or at least of their own souls) from that generally taken by Christian folk. Something of the energetic obstinacy with which they pursue worthy and estimable aims overflows and tinges their notions of conduct less praiseworthy. We are told that we should be prepared to give a reason for the faith that is in us. A Scotchman or Scotchwoman is always prepared to give a reason for the *sin* that is in him or her. Justification by faith with them means faith in their own justification. And this not only individually, but for all of their own kith and kin. It is quite astonishing to see a whole family of the severest prudes placidly contented with their family sinner, and convinced that *her* sin was, and is, most

rationally excusable, even while hunting full cry after some alien outsider who does not belong to them. I am sure, if *we* had such a thing as a family sinner amongst us, at least of the female sex—I am myself the nearest example of it, I suppose, among the males—that even my mother whose severity is known to you, would hold all her “dictums” in suspense for the occasion. There is an anti-Magdalenism in the Northern constitution. No Scottish Mary staunches her tears with her hair; though those lovely penitents are generally painted with golden locks, possibly to enhance and show the difficulty and value of their repentance: nor does the Scottish Peter go out and ‘weep bitterly’ under a conviction of his own irresolution in the path of virtue. It is weakness to lose your self-esteem, and weakness is a thing the Scottish mind abhors. We struggle for that self-esteem under the most untoward circumstances; as a man shipwrecked, and losing a hundred times its value, dives down into the cabin for his watch.

‘When Kenneth Ross gets better, we may probably see in him a fair illustration of the impressive and agreeable distich—

“ When the Devil was sick, the Devil a saint would be ;
But when the Devil got well, the devil a saint was he ! ”

‘ I know this letter will make you angry. I am glad of it. It will rouse you, and do you good. Write and scold me.

‘ And yet—forgive my bitterness. How can I be otherwise than bitter against one who has caused you so much—such unmerited sorrow ? This man may be a true penitent. There may be more joy over him than ever there will be over me, however great may be my needs in that way ; but till we see how the fag-end of this misspent life turns out, and how far

“ Vows made in pain, as violent as void,”

are held to when pain is over, let us not trust too implicitly to the existence of that angelic chorus which we cannot hear.

‘ I shall be anxious to know what Douglas writes in answer to Neil’s communication.

‘ Yours ever,

‘ LORIMER BOYD.’

A tender frightened letter from Lady Charlotte followed, speaking of Scotland as if it had

suddenly become Nova Zembla, and adjuring Gertrude to remember that her father had died of consumption, 'though he was taken everywhere, dear, to be cured and saved,' and with some 'inconsequence' following up this dreary admission with the sentence—

'*Therefore* come at once (or as soon as you can) to the Isle of Wight, where I have already written to take a pastoral cottage' (what Lady Charlotte meant by 'pastoral' must remain a matter of conjecture) 'very near the sea, and away from people—though I must say I do *that* to please *you*, dearest Gertie, for I do not like living only with shrimps—I mean not seeing one's neighbours; not that one's neighbours are always neighbourly, and I'm sure you have reason to think so; though the ones far off are not a bit better than the neighbouring neighbours; witness my cousin Clochnaben, who has written most spiteful and cruel things even now. And she says Kenneth Ross is *shamming*, in order to get you back again, but you are afraid to go to him now, and all sorts of things of that sort. I'm sure I hope people won't think I took the

pastoral cottage, because we were afraid or ashamed either; but I thought *you* would like it best, and that was my reason, and the first week begins next Thursday; so I do hope you and Neil will set out; and tell him there are two boatmen, and thousands of eggs that he can have. I mean the boatmen, and they will amuse him. The birds sit screaming on the rocks, and I wish they would not, for it has such a melancholy sound; but you like those sort of things. And so God bless you, my own dear Gertie, and bring you safe to

‘Your affectionate Mum,

‘C. S.

‘P.S.—I have got such a pretty seaside dress, dark, dark blue, with a quantity of white embroidery—much prettier than black; and I am pleased with it, though my cousin Clochnaben said she hated that sort of dress, and that it made women look as if they were *tattooed* like savages. Very rude, wasn’t it?

‘C. S.

‘P.S. No. 2.—Get yourself a dark-blue linsey-wolsey, my dear Gertie, and don’t cough.’

And Gertie read—and sighed—and pondered—and told Neil that she did not feel well, that her mother had taken a cottage in the Isle of Wight for them, and that the rest of his holidays would be spent there. A sentence she pronounced very hurriedly and timidly, possessed as she was by a vague painful expectation of Neil ‘flying out,’ and refusing to leave the hills that enshrined his cousin Effie.

She mistook—as we do continually mistake even those we love best. Neil no sooner took in the fact that she had been suffering uncomplainingly, and required this change, than he passionately embraced her, expressing himself in broken sentences of self-blame for ‘being such a brute’ as not to see that she was ill—‘so selfish’ to require to have it explained to him—so ‘inexcusable,’ not guessing that it would be better for her to get out of the cold mists of the hills to a better climate.

And with the last sentence the colour suddenly flushed his cheek, for he thought of Effie; and he looked eagerly in his mother’s face, dreaming, ‘If we could but take my cousin with us!’

But he saw nothing in that sweet face but a look of pain and faintness, now becoming habitual.

His farewell to Effie was sad and fervent. She was to write every day, or rather every evening, at the hour that would be so blank and dismal when he should have departed; when his active bounding step should no longer cross the moor, nor his strenuous young arm shorten time by rowing the coble across the lake—when the morning light must come, whether in mist or sunshine, without his radiant eyes; and the evening close in without his comforting voice to cheer her.

Effie wept bitterly. The last he saw of her she was weeping, and turning from his lingering farewell gaze to weep anew within the house.

He thought of those tears all the long day in the railway carriage, starting next morning for England; watching the pale meek countenance of his mother seated opposite to him, and wondering still what the bitter, bitter quarrel could have been, that made Kenneth an alien, and his poor little daughter a banished creature from Glenrossie and the love of its inhabitants.

And his mother, as she stole furtive glances at his restless, passionate, handsome face, felt the cold poison of doubt creep through her heart as she thought,

‘Oh ! will the day ever come when even my boy Neil shall love me less ?’

And she thought, *if* that day ever came, death would be so welcome.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Traces of James Frere.

LADY CHARLOTTE felt rather ill-used by the increasing ill health and depression of spirits of her daughter. She wrote a somewhat peevish and deprecatory letter to Lorimer Boyd :

‘ I took a pretty pastoral cottage here, as you advised ; and indeed only because you advised it, for I don’t much fancy pastoral things myself ; only, Gertie having such reliance on your judgment and your kindness, I thought it for the best to do as you said. But you are quite mistaken in saying she would be the better for it : she is not the least better, rather worse : and she has a cough that keeps me always remembering her poor father ; which is very distressing. I wish you could come from Vienna, for she is

certainly better when you are in the way to talk and read to her. I am sure I would read to her with pleasure, but I don't understand or relish the sort of books, and it is not the same thing; and she doesn't care for news, and I don't know what to do with her. She has left off walking, and lies on the sofa looking at the sea; and all I can get from her is, "I don't feel very strong to-day, little mother."

'Now, of course, when you told me I should do her good by coming here, all this is very disappointing; and I hope you will write to her and advise her not to fret; for I know she is fretting; and the hard thing upon me is, that she frets more now than she did, though nothing new has happened; and though she used to be so fond of pastoral places, and I have got a cottage at Bonchurch just like the one in Moore's *Melodies*,—about Love and Hope, you know—where "he opened the window and flew away." The roses climb right over the roof, and so does the clematis, and, except that there are gnats at night (in spite of a little beginning of frost), she might be so very comfortable! I wish we had never come across these Rosses of Glenrossie, for

what with their tempers, and the things that are said, and Gertrude taking a turn so unexpected, I am quite sick with vexation. I wish she had married any quiet man,—yourself even,—rather than that things should be as they are. Neil is well; and I go out sometimes to see that he don't drown himself. I mean, to see that he has the right boatmen with him; for he is venturesome and reckless to a degree; a Ross all over, and as passionate as any of them; but a dear boy too. And even *he* can't get Gertrude's spirits up; for she says, "Oh my Neil!" "Oh my Neil!" in such a begging voice, it quite makes one's heart ache; and, when he tries to guess what she would have,—and says if it frightens her, this boating, he'll give it up—she shakes her head and says, "No, dearest, it is not that!" But she never says what it *is*; and it is so unlike my Gertie to be so unreasonable.'

And Lorimer, pondering much over this somewhat *décousue* account of matters, wrote, as Lady Charlotte desired, advising Gertrude 'not to fret,' and showing her why she ought not to fret. And he wrote also to Neil,—a long letter, taking the most vehement interest in the boating and

boats, their sailing qualities and tonnage; and narrating adventures of his own in boyish days, and curious anecdotes of various kinds, all more or less connected with this new pursuit. For he thought the eager mind and body of the lad would be all the better for an absorbing occupation of that kind.

He was right.

Cousin Effie's letters came, and were most welcome, and fondly answered. But, after a post or two, they were often pocketed to read 'as soon as he should be afloat in the *Sea Gull*;' and the shifting of a sail or handling of a rope would cause him to look up, and break the thread of Effie's simple and tender sentences; once, indeed, entirely lost to him; for a stiff breeze in rounding a rock, and a sudden rainbow, so engaged Neil's attention, that he suffered the open letter to escape from his hand, and only became aware of the fact, by seeing it flutter and rest like a little white bird on a distant wave, sweep over the next, and then disappear for good.

Even then, Neil bore the deprivation with very cheerful philosophy; sensibly reflecting that he had seen the first line or two, beginning,

‘Papa is better, and things get more and more comfortable;’ and taking for granted that ‘all the rest of it’ was in the same satisfactory strain.

It was on one of the occasions when Lady Charlotte went down to the beach with him, ‘to see that he did not drown himself,’ that an event occurred which thrilled her timid soul with extreme terror.

She was walking along a lonely bit of shore by Black Gang Chine, when a man, who was sauntering in the same direction, came near and joined her, as it seemed, in her walk. He was not a gentleman, nor a common sailor; Lady Charlotte could not make out what he was. She felt a mixture of anger and fear at his self-imposed companionship; and looked anxiously about for Neil; but Neil was nowhere to be seen.

At last she summoned courage, and asked the man which way he was going, whether he ‘wanted anything;’ ‘money or anything?’ The man laughed, and said he would be very glad of anything the lady pleased to bestow. But, even after pocketing the half-crown which followed his reply, he continued to walk by her

side. 'I do mostly walk this way,' he said. 'I've had a hard tussle with a mate of mine, and I'm on the look-out to see him again. You see, ma'am, I'm a smuggler; or rayther I *was* a smuggler; but, getting acquainted with a farmer's daughter here, she over-persuades me, like, to give up them sort of ways; and her father, he made a point of it, saying no man should have his daughter that did not get his livin' in a honest way; and there was plenty of honest ways without smuggling. Well, I resolves to cut the concern, and I goes to my mate (there was two of us) and says, "Give me my half-share of the value of the boat, for I'm going to leave her!" It didn't please him; and we had a wrangle; and he says, "Leave, you may; but the value of the boat you don't get." I said I would; he said I shouldn't; and, when high words had passed, he clinched them with these words—"She's a smuggling craft, and you'll hardly be able to take the law of me to get her value; so be off, like a sneaking fellow as you are." Well, I'd depended on the money for getting things for my Mary, and I thought, and thought, and thought, how to be revenged on him; and sure

enough in the night I went where the boat lay in the cove ready for her next run, and I sawed, and cut, and worked with a will, I can tell you, till half the boat was no more use than splinters, and then I stuck up a board with a paper on it with his own words written, against he should come: "She's a smuggling craft, and you'll hardly be able to *take the law of me.*"

'Oh gracious! how could you?' exclaimed Lady Charlotte, looking fearfully at the stern profile of her unwelcome companion as he walked by her side.

'Well, you see, he was hindering me of my Mary. And he was all rags when he come here, when first I put him in the way of earning, and we'd made many a trip together, and he's over to the French coast now, among friends of mine! I only wish——'

His countenance was so fierce as he wished—whatever the wish might be—that Lady Charlotte stopped short in her walk, and stood tremblingly feeling in her reticule for more money. She found a sovereign, with which, in her agitation, she presented him, saying, civilly, 'I really am very sorry for you, but you

see you should not—you really shouldn't—be so unforgiving !'

Then, as she beheld the very welcome sight of Neil approaching with his boatmen, she recovered herself enough to smile a little ; and she said, ' I thought, at one time, that perhaps you were thinking of robbing me, do you know ?'

' Well, I *was* thinking of it,' said the man, carelessly, ' but I didn't know who might be up among the rocks there, or whether that very young gent now in sight mightn't be coming to you ; and, besides, you seemed such a harmless soul to take advantage of. But——'

He stopped suddenly ; his eye lit, and flashed like a signal-gun. ' By ——, there he is !' he exclaimed, as he darted down the rough shore. Lady Charlotte looked in that direction, and saw two figures—a man in the garb of a common sailor, and a female neatly dressed in rather a foreign peasant style. They were near enough for her to be perfectly able to distinguish both face and form ; and in the common sailor she recognised—with extreme alarm—the ever-changing adventurer, James Frere—and in the foreign-

looking woman, however disguised, most certainly
AILIE !

They were landing when she first observed them. On seeing the man who had been the companion of her walk running towards them, they stood still. Then James Frere leaped back again into the boat, holding out his hand to his companion, who lightly followed his example; and he pushed off from the shore just as the breathless smuggler reached the water's edge. The man shouted and swore; Frere laughed, and shook an oar menacingly at him. Then a boy, lying at the bottom of the boat—and a man in her, whom they had not yet perceived—shook out the sail, and with a bound and a dip in the waters she was off again, soon to appear only like a white speck in the distance !

The smuggler stood a while watching that boat as she danced over the waves. Then he slowly returned to the spot where Neil had rejoined Lady Charlotte.

‘Good evening, ma’am,’ he said, ‘and thank you ! As to yon man, I’ll have him yet. His things are all here. He’ll need to come back before many days are out—I’ll give informa-

tion.' And he strode away slowly over the sands.

If Lady Charlotte could have doubted the accuracy of her own vision, all doubt would have been removed by Neil, who, flushed and eager, said to her, as he came up, 'There's that man I saw change his clothes in the railway—he's in the boat. I can't mistake him—he has a most strange countenance. It is he—I'll swear to him. Look, Mamma-Charlotte!'

'Yes,' thought Lady Charlotte, 'and I'll swear to Alice Ross.' And, when she regained the little gate of the 'pastoral' cottage, she passed in very quickly, and told Gertrude the adventure.

'And is it not *too* dreadful, Gertie, his always coming up through a trap-door in this sort of way?—I mean like a demon who comes up, you know, through a trap-door.'

CHAPTER XXIV.

*James Frere is Recognised by another
Person.*

Poor Lady Charlotte! She was doomed in this tranquil and pastoral retreat to all sorts of agitating scenes connected with the gentleman who thus came up continually, as it were, through a trap-door!

She was standing—as she herself expressed it—‘most harmlessly,’ talking about the ‘getting up’ of her fine muslins and embroidered cuffs, with an old washerwoman whose pride it was that ‘she was the principallest laundress of these parts, and washed for the principallest gentry by the sea-side.’

The good old soul continued ironing all the time she talked, and looking down with affec-

tionate smiles upon the linen benefited by her manipulation.

‘Ah!’ she said, ‘all the visitors comes to me that *can*; and it’s a real treat to me to see the valets, and lady’s-maids, and such folk, coming here as civil as need be, a-begging and a-praying of me to give *their* lady or *their* gentleman the preference—for I can’t do all. But I mostly prefers the gentlemen’s, and some of them be really wonderful! Lord Sinclair’s—his be pretty shirts enough to iron—werry smooth soft linen. And Captain Greig’s,—them *are* beauties; all worked across the *breastesses*—to be sure, how they be worked! And Colonel Vavasour’s—his be wonderful, too. And Mr. Gordon’s—his’n has little frills down the fronts; they be a deal o’ trouble, surely, them little frills; but they’re a real pleasure to look at, when the Italian iron’s been under ’em. And here’s a thing was sent me to wash,—that looks for all the world like somebody’s skin,—but was sent here by a woman they calls a West Injian. They did say she was a wild savage—but, if she be a savage, she be wery unlike *my* notion of the creatures, for she’s as soft a spoken woman as ever I seed. And she’s got this

close fit of pink flannel, to cover her from head to foot, for she has the shivers, with the cold, and she comes from some warm place—I'm sure I forgets the name—but it's beyond seas, and there's a governor, and he's as good as king there . . .

‘La! if she ain't coming this minute, and I not half ready.’

The aged washerwoman ironed with redoubled diligence; but, before the ironing was done, the door of the cottage was darkened, and in came a sad-looking, sallow woman, past the flower of youth, but still with claims to beauty, her eyes passing languidly over all objects as she advanced, as if nothing in life was much worth noticing; and resting at last in quiet contemplation on the pink flannel garment. You saw at once that she was a Creole, but a gentlewoman.

‘Is it finished?’ she said, with a soft drawl.
‘Give it me if it is finished.’

The old washerwoman passed a final sweep of the warm iron over the sleeves of the garment in question; flattened, folded, and again passed the iron over; and then, pinning it in a white handkerchief, presented it to the new-comer.

As she did so, the threshold of her cottage was

again shadowed, and close to Lady Charlotte—close to the Creole—passed in James Frere, followed by Alice Ross, asking about lodgings.

The latter started visibly at sight of Lady Ross's mother. Fearless as she was, her presence of mind forsook her. She grasped James Frere's arm anxiously, and averted her face.

'Oh, come away; come away from this place!' she said in an agitated whisper.

But James Frere was absorbed in another recognition. Another hand lay on his arm, and the languid Creole's eyes were warm with wonder and anger.

'Ah, James, do I see you at last? You cruel James!'

There was an effort on the part of Frere to affect unconsciousness, to affect strangeness; but he also seemed for once, in the bewilderment of the moment, to lose his self-possession.

'Anita!' he exclaimed.

'Yes, you cruel. Anita! And now she has found you, she will not again be left. Oh, James, how could you leave me without one word? To wake and find you gone! Oh, James!'

Alice Ross had hitherto stood speechless and

motionless; her glittering eyes only seeming to have some movement in them, rippling like a green gleam over the ocean wave. But, as the Creole accompanied the last words by a passionate seizure of Frere's arm, she sprang upon her like a tigress, and shook her off, crying with shrill anger,—‘Woman, how dare you call my husband JAMES? How dare you call him by his Christian name before *me*, whatever your intimacy may have been?’

‘My intimacy? Your husband?’ laughed the Creole. ‘This man is married as much as law can marry him, to *ME*. I am his wife,—his lawful wife, and I will claim him—for I have a son—even though he deserted me in Jamaica.’

CHAPTER XXV.

Ailie Surprised.

HERE was a brief stormy explanation ; incontestable and uncontested truths were evolved from Frere's past history ; and at last the Creole, coming close to shuddering Ailie, murmured to her in a voice choked with passion, ' Are you so mean a spirit ? Would you not some revenge ? I am his wife. You are nothing but his mistress. Have you children ? I have a son. Think not that I will forego my claim. All is not for myself. Will you not prosecute for bigamy, as they can in your country ? If not, that will *I* do.'

' Nothing but his mistress !' ' Nothing but his mistress !' The words beat backwards and forwards in Ailie's brain. At last she spoke : she hissed the words fiercely through her teeth :—

‘Deny it!’ she said, without looking at him.
‘Deny it!’

‘Nonsense!’ said Frere, contemptuously.
‘You must have known it was so. In the bitter gossip reported to Sir Douglas it was told. You knew it. Don’t be affected. You knew it.’

The light in Ailie’s eyes flickered like a flame of phosphorus.

‘I did *not* know it!’ she said; and then, looking the Creole over from head to foot, she said, as if to herself, ‘Did he marry a *slave*?’

‘I am no slave, but a planter’s daughter!’ angrily retorted the Creole, ‘and you had’ best keep your contempt for your own position. I am as educated as you are—and rich, rich, rich! My father is dead, and I have come to England. I claim my husband; but he shall be punished. My many nights of tears—he shall pay them. I will prosecute him by your laws—I will prosecute him.’

Ailie looked at the man whose evil influence had joined with *her* evil, to create confusion in her destiny. A chill trembling seized her.

‘Yes,’ she said to Frere, ‘you *shall* suffer! Call vainly on me when your punishment comes—call

vainly. I will crush you, I will tread you into the earth. Deceiver !'

Two or three boatmen gathered round the door, attracted by the sound of voices in dispute. Others joined them. Among them came the smuggler. He sprang on Frere, and wrestled and strove to hold him. In a moment a knife glittered in the air ; it grazed the bending head of the Creole in its descent, and struck the smuggler's breast : was lifted once more,—the warm blood dropping from its pointed blade on the women's dresses and the linen the aged washerwoman had been garrulously gossiping about,—and descended yet more vehemently. They seized him. ' Devils, let me go !' he said ; and, turning, shook himself free, and fled over the shore.

He was pursued, but not taken. Swift of foot and wiry of limb, he reached an almost inaccessible crag, lifted a huge broken piece of sand-stone, and flung it below,—scattering his pursuers as it rolled down with dust and fragments of the rock from one pointed peak to another, and coming at last with a dead resounding thump upon the shore.

When they looked up, he was gone ! Some

said he had himself fallen into the ocean, in his frantic efforts to crush those who stood below: some, that he had slid down the smoother side of the cliff, and endeavoured, by swimming and diving, to reach a distant point, where there was a pathway which led to the sea.

But this much was certain, that, stare as they would along the yellow curves and indentations of the sandy shore, or up by the grey rocks where the sea-fowl sat mute or rose screaming into the air, no object resembling a human form dotted the distance.

James Frere was dead, or had escaped. And Ailie, too, had vanished, when Lady Charlotte at last recovered sufficiently from the horrors of the scene to look consciously on objects near her.

Ailie had vanished. Only the Creole woman stood there, wiping her bespattered shoulder and neck, and gazing down as in a dream on the smuggler, stretched on the floor; his strong right hand still vainly clutching the folds of linen he caught as he fell,—caught, as the drowning wretch catches at the bending reed, that goes down with him into the darkness and the depths of overwhelming death.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Barren, Barren Shore!

IT was twilight,—dreary, drizzling, cloudy twilight, such as we sometimes endure with a sort of impatient sadness, even when there is no cause for grief. A twilight that dulls our spirits as it sinks over the leaden sea. Colour gone,—light gone,—warmth gone,—all silent, and wet, and cold. The wind low and hushed: coming in little fitful gusts round the rocks and hollow caves; puffs of weak vapour; no freshness, no wildness in the blast; as if great Nature were, in the words of Shakespeare,—

‘In all her functions weary of herself.’

The tiny lodgings and cottages by the sea were beginning to darken. One after one the glimmering

lights went out. The terrified old washerwoman pulled down her sleeves over her bare arms, and looked round with a shudder at the scoured and mopped floor of her dwelling, before she sat down to supper with two gaping friends who had dropped in to keep her company after the awful event of the day.

Lady Charlotte was recovering from repeated hysterics in the 'pastoral cottage' covered with roses and honey-suckles; and leaning her head on Gertrude's shoulder was watching, with something like a returning smile, the energetic attempts of Neil to make tea and wait on her and his mother. Far away, at the police-station, quivered the gas-light over the door, and with a ghastly brilliancy shone on the closed shutters of the room where the murdered smuggler's corpse was lying; waiting for evidence, and coroner's inquest, and some one to own and identify him, and to take some sort of interest in this sudden destruction of a man in the prime of life and life's energies.

And duly, by and by, muffled in a shawl—ashamed of her love; of his fate; of the brawl with some unknown ruffian, his companion in a

lawless trade which her father had disapproved and which had now cost him his life—came the decent farmer's daughter, the Mary of his obscure love-story, to sob, and sigh, and drop short agitated curtsies when questioned by the sergeant of police, and admit that it was some one she knew; some one to whose identity 'all at home' could speak! And then she went back to the quiet farm and her parents, and back to her little lonely room; where her half-made wedding-gown lay neatly folded, with thread, scissors, and needle-book on the top of it; and the bright French silk neckerchief (his last gift) hung over the looking-glass; and where her Prayer-book and Bible were set on the chest of drawers, with wild flowers drying between their leaves gathered in their pleasant walk the last Sunday, when she had persuaded him to go to church; that Sunday when her father had shaken hands with him for the first time, and even her mother had asked him if he would stay tea. That happy, quiet Sunday!

And Mary wept and prayed, and wept again. Going through that phase of bitter anguish known to more hearts than hers; the lament for

one whose death is lamented by no one else ; the lament for one, thought by others unworthy, but on whom we ourselves pinned many a hope. Unshared was the grief of her patient heart. She knew that her father and mother were sitting downstairs talking over the matter in whispers : sorry for their young daughter : but not sorry—rather relieved—that by this stroke of destiny her imprudent love was brought to a close. So she wept, and made her moan,—till, at her tiny lattice window also, the light was put out that made one of the sparks on the land above the shore,—went out, and told no tale of the hopes extinguished within ; nor that a poor simple girl lay sobbing herself to sleep, in the darkness that succeeded.

But on the long cold stretch of the sea-shore stood one who neither wept, nor rested, nor slept.

Ailie was there !

Her head was uncovered to the drizzling rain. Her boa, twisted round her slender throat, was clutched at from time to time with restless fingers, as the light puffs of wind waved the dangling ends of the fur. She was shivering ; less with cold than intense nervous excitement ;

alternately moving swiftly and pausing; more cat-like than ever in the dim sad light.

More cat-like than ever! At one moment she would scud swiftly over the damp sands with soundless footsteps, and be lost behind the cliff. Then with slow, stealthy, deliberate pace, she would emerge, advance a few yards, and stop: motionless and watchful, yet watching nothing: looking over the sea—the objectless, grey, low line of the undulating sea—with a fixed stare; her eyes gleaming in the faint light; her spare figure making a sort of shadowy column between sand and sky. And thus she would remain till, all of a sudden, the spirit of swift scudding would awake in her again, and send her flitting along the shore with such rapidity that the eye lost her, and only became conscious of her reappearance when again the stealthy pace, the objectless pause, the long stare at nothing visible, the slight gesture of the governing hand that would fain keep the boa from imitating the movements of animal life, when stirred by the capricious air, — broke the monotony, and gave something of a less visionary nature to her presence on those gloomy sands.

Oh, very dismal and barren of all hope was that shore to the eyes of Alice Ross! She might recross the sea in the light sailing-boat which had borne her from France; she might put countries and continents between her and her native land; but across the gulf of black thoughts, across the ocean tinged with blood, across the disturbed billows of rage and confusion which tossed her soul, nevermore could she be steered to any quiet haven. Nevermore!

Nor was she dreaming of quiet; nor desirous of peace; nor pitying any of the actors or sufferers in the strange tragedy of the morning, except herself; nor yearning to blot out all that had occurred that day, like a bad dream. Active, restless, full of the supple energy of the animal she so closely resembled; sharp and feverish were the workings of her busy brain.

Ailie was not thinking of the terrible past; she was planning a terrible future. She was thinking of James Frere: not as a false lover, a common swindler, a murderer amenable to the laws of his country. No, no; none of these things. She was thinking of him solely as her PREY.

He had had many a narrow escape, but this time his fate shall doom him. He shall not escape AILIE!

Woe to the man who is loved with the passion that has neither tenderness nor affection to soften it: who is loved not for his own sake, but for the selfish sake of the woman who has mated with him! The opposite of that love is hate. The serpent hatched from the Egyptian warmth of that sterile soil, is vengeance. Pity, and regret, and the sad quiet partings of a humbled heart; the unutterable and fiery sense of wrong quenched and conquered by a flood of better and holier feelings: all these things are unknown to such women. Their impulse is to slay Jason's children to punish Jason. They fulfil the Scriptural malediction which says, 'Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel.'

Ailie thought over the links that had bound her to Frere, and all that she had said, done, and suffered, till a delirium of wild revenge thrilled her brain.

'*Don't be affected.*' '*You knew it.*' '*Nonsense.*' These were the words of insult he had tossed at her before that other woman, the 'Anita,' he had

recognised! Words spoken, no doubt, to deceive that Creole wife; perhaps to pave the way for reconciliation with her. She was rich; she had boasted of her riches. Everything over which Alice Ross had power as her own property, she had lent or given to James Frere. The Creole had said that her father was dead; and she was rich, and so had come to England. What though she had spoken angrily at that first meeting? Frere would have power to soften her. He had fled, but it was not clear that he knew that he had *killed* the man he struck at; it was not clear that he knew he was a murderer.

Where could he flee to? that was the question. All his haunts; his tricks of disguise and hiding; his fox-like, craftily-contrived holes; his means of evading and eluding: his daring ways and cunning devices; were they not known to Alice? Had he not himself revealed and boasted of them in the days of their 'love?'

Only one thing for ever marked him: the scar on his cruel right hand.

Yes, he was marked. She was glad of that. That would help *others* to track him. Others not so well acquainted with his manifold contrivances.

She remembered the first day she had ever noticed that scar ; the day the Dowager Clochnaben had asked him to sketch some architectural improvements for her grim castle.

She saw him now as in a vision ; saw him—as she stood with the drizzling rain damp on her hair, and the leaden sea cold and sad at her feet—seated in the great room at Clochnaben ; with all its stately old furniture ; its huge comfortable grate, full of pine-logs burning with a scented odour ; its heavy shining table on which lay the maps, and books, and the slanting portfolio with blood-red strings from which he took the etchings he had made. She saw his smile once more ; that smile when their eyes met ; THE smile, that told her there was more in the soul of that wandering preacher than was taught by his Scriptural texts ; and yet she had liked him the better for it, and welcomed with a thrill of passion that irregular and intelligent face as her ideal of male beauty. She saw his hand—that scarred, that *forging* hand—with its light firm touch, and pencil of power, busy in its task that harmless night. She saw it raised and bleeding in the blue lake by the Hut, when he dived for

Eusebia's bracelet, and Giuseppe had recognised him and exclaimed against him.

And lastly, in the rapid magic lantern of her shifting visions, she saw him lying in the Highland cottage; simulating to the simple and pious minister the woes of a blind beggar, and cunningly obtaining his assistance and charitable recommendation. She saw the low sunshine gleam in on the tartan quilt of the lowly bed as she sat by him; illumining the edge of the bed-frame polished and worn by age, the dark green check of the quilt, and the forger's hand; as he held Gertrude's and Kenneth's letters, steadily gazing at the writing with those eyes supposed to be filmed in darkness, preparatory to exerting once again those skilful fingers in their power of imitative art, for the satisfaction of a base revenge on the innocent.

That hand; that thin scarred hand! Clear as the awful image of warning that came out and wrote on the walls of a palace—'Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin,' she saw it rise between her and the sullen sky and cold grey sea that dim and dreary evening. And, as all the passing dreams of her mind faded and vanished, the swift scud-

ding movement returned to her limbs, and flit, flit, flit, went Alice; over the sands, and round the rocks, and up the cliff, and along the narrow pathway; no sound in her footfall, only in the click of the little painted wicket-gate at the garden of the inn where she and Frere had passed the preceding night.

There she paused, and passed in with slackened and furtive tread; looking up at the window of her own room, where a light was still burning. And gathering her dress more closely round her to escape the wet—which dripped from the late autumn roses, and trickled down the cairn-like heaps of huge flints with couch-shells set about them, which formed the chief ornament of that circumscribed Eden—she felt, at last, all the chill which busy thought had deadened as yet to her senses!

So, answering in the negative the question of the sleepy servant-girl, if she would ‘take something’ before she went to bed, she stole shivering upstairs to rest.

And there—in the very chamber where he of the scarred hand had slept in security the night before—did Ailie lay her head on her pillow,

resolved that he should die an ignominious death 'by the laws of his country.' No more meeting with 'Anita;' no more insult to Ailie; but death—death—death—and disgrace.

The lingering light at *her* chamber-window burnt long and low; but at length even that sign of wakeful life disappeared—and all along the coast was dark!

The damp drizzle and weak gusty wind of the evening, gradually rose to wild beating rain and wilder storms. The sea rose and the tempest howled. Undermanned and overladen merchant-vessels—whose owners had to think twice before paying port-dues—lost spars and sails, and drove regretfully past havens of refuge; and prouder ships rode out the blast, or took shelter where best they might.

But through the storm, as through the calm, Ailie's fearless eye watched the darkness; and with a fierce compression of her fingers she muttered every now and then,—'He shall be hunted down,—hunted down!'

Long she pondered where to begin the feline watch and pitiless chase. He would not surely go back to France? St. Malo was the haunt of

the smuggling companions he had lately consorted with. Would he go to Jersey? It was too small for hiding, and too probable a place for the searching visit of the police. He would go to London! In that vast struggling hive, with its eternal murmur of a working, striving, occupied population, any one might hide and be forgotten. He would surely go to London.

So Ailie made her slender package, and was off at dawn of day. Having paid the bill to her nervous landlady before the tardy inquiries of the police as to the young foreign woman who was seen with the murderer the day before,—and whose place of lodging had only just been made out,—disturbed the small household; filled the taproom with sinister agitation; and set the hostess herself off in tearful protestations of the extreme respectability of her house; into which, if her account might be trusted, no foot had ever passed that might not have walked in equal procession with the holiest of saints and martyrs.

To London, then, went Ailie, and set her catlike watch at many a ruined hole, and saw the walls placarded here and there with the great words MURDER and REWARD, and read in various

papers the variously abridged accounts of the event. The long details in *Lloyd's*; the brief notice in the *Morning Post*; the stern methodic account in the *Daily Telegraph*; the tiny corner devoted to 'Murder in the Isle of Wight,' in the superb and overflowing *Times*.

And still, as she read, the hunger of her starved revenge grew keener, and through the streets she knew of old to be his haunts she flitted in the dim foggy evenings, as she had flitted over the sea sands; her eyes dilating sometimes as she followed with furtive step a figure resembling Frere's to the door of some low lodging in court or alley, only to close, with an exasperated moan of impatience and disappointment, as she slunk back from the aspect of a stranger.

Pains thrown away; calculations shrewd in vain; for Frere—that man of shifts and expedients—knew too well that the safe thing to do under such circumstances is the one thing you are expected *not* to do; and, while furtive Ailie was prowling wearily through bye-streets and round foggy corners between the Strand and the river, he was sitting fearlessly in gay French theatres and French cafés—his black hair curled

and perfumed—dining well and enjoying himself; ‘waiting for remittances from Madrid;’ and getting all current expenses meanwhile lavishly provided for by a young lordling setting out on his first independent tour, whom he had amused and looked after during a very rough and sick passage to Havre; and who had already decided that he was ‘the pleasantest fellow upon earth,’—expressing a hope that (as soon as those remittances should arrive) they might join purses and travel together over the continent.

And James Frere spoke his thanks and made conversation, in very pretty broken English; for he was a Spanish hidalgo for the nonce, just returned from Mexico. And a gentleman’s linen may certainly be marked ‘J.F.’ whose name is not James Frere, but Marquis José de los Frios.

So Ailie wandered in vain. The streets, like the sands, were barren; and the tide of human events washed sluggishly backwards and forwards over the sunken wreck of her life, but brought nothing to the surface!

CHAPTER XXVII.

Gertrude made Jealous.

THE horror with which Lady Charlotte was seized at the idea of any further residence in the pastoral cottage, 'where you see, my darling Gertie, we might evidently any day be most likely murdered in our beds,' was so great, that there was no contesting the advisability of removal; and their preparations for departure were accordingly made with as close an imitation of Ailie's haste as the greater multiplicity of objects to be removed rendered possible.

Biting the end of her long ringlet, and trembling very visibly, Lady Charlotte sat watching each successive trunk and *carton* corded and directed to her town address; smiling nervously at their lids, and repeating to her maid, 'You see, Sansonnet, London is such a nice *safe* place—so safe and nice. I'm sure I wish we were there!

So very safe; so many policemen, and houses, you know, on each side of one, and no back doors—only the area. These pastoral places are dreadfully dangerous. Dear me! Only to think of what I've gone through. And it might have been any of us! You can't tell what that sort of man will do. It's a mercy he didn't take it into his head to stab us all round. And he isn't caught yet; you know they couldn't catch him, which indeed is all for the best; I mean that if they *had* laid hold of him, of course he would have killed them all. So the sooner we get to London the better. But now don't get flurried, Sansonnet; you are crushing down that white crape hat with *bluets* most dreadfully; just lift the lid! You may have the bonnet for yourself that I wore that day. I shall never be able to look at it again. So horrid. Oh, dear me! Do be as quick as you can, my good Sansonnet, and let us get into safety. I never, never will leave London again. It was Mr. Boyd's idea—not mine in the least. And he said it would do my daughter so much good, and I ask you if it has done her any good at all? Certainly not; only these clever men are so wilful and obstinate.

You never can get Mr. Boyd to have any opinion but his own; a little of his mother in him; a *little* of his mother. Obstinate, you know. And now see what has come of it! Murder has been done, and Gertrude not a bit the better. I'm quite glad to get away, and I shall write to Mr. Boyd and tell him so. Horrid! And my darling Gertie so patient too, and quite anxious we should start. I shall certainly write and show Mr. Boyd how wrong he was to advise us to come. Now, Sansonnet, *do* shut the basket trunk! You can iron the dresses you know when we get to town, if they are a little crushed. Anything is better than staying among robbers and murderers—anything!'

And so the fragile lady chattered nervously on; and never gave her ringlet any rest till she sat on the deck of the steamer for Southampton, with her pretty little fringed parasol held carefully over one of the bonnets that had *not* been present at the murder, smiling at every one and at every thing, and repeating from time to time, 'I feel so safe, going back, you know, dear Gertie; don't *you* feel safe and comfortable? And dear Neil,—I'm sure even he is glad to

be safe, though of course he was sorry to leave his boat and those horrid gulls. But he is to stuff two of the gulls, and they will be very pretty in the dining-room. They won't make that screaming either, after they are stuffed. He, he, he!'

And Lady Charlotte gave a little merry tittering laugh after the last observation, for she was under the impression that she had made a jest; and she felt besides altogether glad and in spirits, escaping thus with life and limb from the dangers of pastoral retirement.

But nothing could make Gertrude Ross feel glad or in spirits. Day by day her melancholy deepened. Day by day her health failed. More beautiful than she had been in early girlhood, her beauty was yet further increased by a transparency of complexion and hectic colour which began now to be habitual.

Her mother saw it with alarm. With alarm she listened to the evasive answers of the physician in attendance; answers evasive and unsatisfactory even to her simple mind, sharpened on this one subject alike by affection and experience. And consoling friends—careless or unconscious of the suffering and fright consequent

on their words—told her they ‘feared dear Lady Ross was going the same way her father had gone before her,’ and that they had known many instances of rapid decline in persons who had been made ‘anxious and uncomfortable,’ ‘when the taint was in the constitution, my dear.’

And out of the letters of reproach, appeal, and confused explanation, which Lady Charlotte kept inditing to Vienna, as if Lorimer Boyd was in lieu of Providence, and could keep her daughter alive and well if he only chose to take sufficient pains in the matter, came at last a tender counter-reproach from Lorimer himself; complaining of a certain reticence in Gertrude’s letters to him, giving so little account of her own feelings or state of health.

And out of that again a nervous, repressed, yet anguished answer from poor Gertrude, not absolutely saying, but implying, that he *could not understand* her state of mind. That he—without those dear and intimate ties which were hers, (and yet not hers!) could not be expected to comprehend that her heart was torn up by the roots; and that she seemed to herself to be not so much dying, as already dead, in some respects;

dead to all interest in usual things; and sad, even about her deepest interest; her one source of joy and consolation,—her adored Neil. And then came from Lorimer a letter so passionate that the colour flushed to Gertrude's temples as she read it; scarcely recognising, in its impetuous burst, the grave grim caustic friend, whose reticence on such subjects had always seemed to be far greater than her own.

‘You think then, dear Gertrude (for there is no other possible translation of your letter), that there are bounds to my sympathy for you,—that, in vulgar parlance, I cannot understand you? You have put it gently, carefully, sweetly. Where there is regard (less regard than that which I trust you feel for me,—your old friend, and your father's friend),—we do all of us endeavour as it were to sheathe our thoughts in soft words; even to those whose intimacy with us enables them to fling away that velvet scabbard, and leave the thoughts as bare, sharp, and wounding, as before they were slipped into their useless covering.

‘The scabbard is worn in vain, for me!’

‘You are mistaken, dear Gertrude! Dear

child of the man I loved before you grew to lovely womanhood, you are mistaken! I feel and know all you imagine must be unknown to me. Do you think *I* have lived till now and never loved? Do you think I have not also experienced how difficult it is to bend one's mind even to wholesome hopes, before the hour-glass of sorrow is well turned, or its sand has begun to fall? That I do not know how miserable a thing it is to struggle with the clinging thought that one might yet be blest with reconciling love, — instead of being obliged to give a person up utterly? The difference between imprisonment and death! The one a prolonged torture, the other only a merciful blow. Do you think I am unacquainted with that sensation of utter indifference to all subjects and events which bear no relation to the object painfully beloved? With that consciousness, that, for aught we care, the earth might crumble with all upon it, as long as standing room was left for two?

‘I tell you that I know that love! I know the power that makes all other vexations seem like the raving of a far-off storm to one that sits safely sheltered. The power that can build,

as it were, round the human heart walls so massive that the indistinct thing is the thunder of the world's tempests,—while near, and dear, and sweetly audible, sounds the voice whose low music thrills every pulse of our being.

‘My dear Gertrude, do not doubt me. You are so much to me,—*even as we are*,—that my life would be barren, but for the belief that I am something to you. Do not write me letters reserved in their sorrow and their fears. They make me feel like a miserable alien. I call to you at such times, but there is no echo. I look for you, but I cannot find you! Tell me you think you are dying—tell me your heart is breaking for this miserable madness in our ever dear Douglas (which one day *must* have an end!)—but do not exile me from your confidence, and bid me stand,—after so many years of intimate companionship,—far off, among the group of common friends, who are left to conjecture your sufferings and ask news of you in vain.’

When Lorimer Boyd had despatched his letter, he would have given much to rewrite it. Especially he regretted, yea, was inwardly stung by the memory of the phrase, ‘*even as we are*.’

Would she take it as an allusion to his concealed love for her? Would she notice it, not in words, but by a yet further evidence of reserve in her correspondence? He stood, grim and gloomy, looking over the Bastei on the dotted dwellings of the Viennese suburbs, ashamed, and angry with himself. Would his letter seem importunate and distasteful? Had he said so much, only to produce estrangement between them instead of increased confidence? Ah! idiot that he had been to pass the boundary line he had set to himself for many a long year, and change from the tone of habitual gravity or *persiflage*, to plunge into passionate phrases that might draw down on him a repulse, however gently given!

He tormented himself needlessly. Tender, and soft, and thankful, were all the words of Gertrude's answer. Tender, and utterly unconscious! One timid sentence,—expressive of a certain degree of surprise that any one he had 'honoured with his love' should have failed to respond,—he found there; and one simple allusion to the very phrase he had almost cursed himself for writing; that '*even as we are*,' which had been such a burden of hot lead in his thoughts.

She took that phrase to mean the distance that separated them as contrasted with their constant companionship in former days; and promised to tell him all, 'even as if we were sitting consulting together, as in the old happy days, in the pretty room of the Villa Mandórlo, how best to spare Sir Douglas pain about Kenneth.'

And Lorimer, relieved, and half-satisfied, fell back on his old style of letter-writing, and spake no more of pining love or wild enthusiasms. Common topics, passing jests, indifferent discussions, again filled the many pages that travelled from the distant *chancellerie* to the white hand that broke the seal so languidly, and the sweet eyes whose lids grew heavier each succeeding day.

He strove to interest and amuse; to jest with her, as men will do (and women too) who feel that they have been on the verge of a dangerous confession of an attachment that never can prosper, or which never should have been avowed.

'Vienna is very dull,' he said, 'so at least I am told. It is at all events very empty. I think of wearing a coat of skins and a conical cap, such

as Robinson Crusoe is represented in ; and going about with a poll parrot on my finger, looking for a footprint in the Prater or public drive. Mrs. Cregan was here for a short time with her pretty daughter ; the mother the most admired of the two. Though, indeed, a fair beauty of Viennese society with a most German wealth of hair, insisted that the luxuriant brown plaits of the English stranger were ‘postiches.’ But going to the Opera a little hurried and dishevelled was considered tantamount to having walked over red-hot ploughshares, and Mrs. Cregan came off triumphant and completely cleared. The Opera is my sole pleasure ! You know how I love music ; and, though the voices sound thin after the full-throated bubbling richness of Italian singing, these people are on the whole better musicians.

‘A backward people, too. We had an alarm of fire the other night, and a prodigious *incendie* it turned out to be. A whole convent burned down. Anything worse than the arrangements for getting water on such an occasion, it is impossible to conceive. Here, with the Donau carrying the Danube into the heart of Vienna, it

was brought in *barrels*, such as serve to lay the dust in other cities. The fright of the crowd was extreme; and the rushing about of water-carts and engines, with men standing up in them, holding immense pine-torches, scattering sparks and flakes of fire, as if handing about samples of the destruction going on wholesale, made a picture very strange and not very edifying to my unaccustomed eye.

‘ I heard an interesting anecdote at the Hospital for the Insane. A poor young lady there, quite mad, but gentle (“mad for being forsaken,” as her attendant assured me), had yet so much of rational system left in her bewildered brain, that she regularly and daily taught the child of one of the keepers to write and read,* and heard her lessons with the most methodical care. I was much touched by the story; that wandering mind, unfit to associate with grown-up people, still keeping so far in advance as to be of use to an ignorant child; shut out, too, from usual companionship on earth, and (according to our views) irresponsible for her actions in the eye of Heaven,

* Fact.

yet able to train another mind in some degree to knowledge and duty.

‘I will tell you nothing more to-day, but you are to tell me all about yourself and your health. ALL, or I shall write and complain to Lady Charlotte, who always writes and complains to me, when you are not well, till she has almost brought me to think it is somehow my fault when you cough or have bad headaches.

‘Yours ever,

‘LORIMER BOYD.’

And in the process of their ‘infamous correspondence,’ as Lady Clochnaben had termed this interchange of letters, Gertrude did struggle to tell him all,—all that she felt or feared for herself, for Neil, for her gentle little mother, and much of what she felt and feared about Sir Douglas.

Only one thing Gertrude kept buried in her heart, and yet it was the bitterest pang of all. She had grown jealous. A new miserable pain had risen like a flickering tongue of fire, and seared where it touched.

Sir Douglas had been very ill, very unwell ;

the hardships that were trying so many fine constitutions round him, and were borne so bravely by all, told on a frame stricken by anxiety and vexation. His eyes, too, had suffered. He had scarcely been able to read or write for some time. In this condition he had, he said, received much kindness from one of the officers' wives who had come out to join her husband. He did not say much of this lady, except that she sang to him. She 'had one of the sweetest voices he had ever heard,' and had written some of his letters for him.

Human nature is human nature, and dreadful as it used to be to Gertrude to think of her husband lonely in his sadness and suffering, it was more dreadful still to dwell on the picture thus conjured up of his being tended, consoled, charmed, by another.

All day long, and in her mournful dreams, Gertrude's feverish imagination dwelt on the circumstances. What was she like, this rival unknown, who took her place, and usurped her duties? She must be young and fair. Voices fade, like all other things; the most melodious

tones grow flat and hoarse and weak in age, and this was 'one of the sweetest voices Sir Douglas had ever heard.' ONE of the sweetest. Oh! had he yet some memory of hers? Had he forgotten the Sabbath singing, so cruelly commented upon by the Dowager Clochnaben and the hypocrite James Frere, when she, his wife, soothed the hours made weary with the same pain as now, and the same deprivation of common occupation?

Could he hear sweet singing and forget hers? Forget his own praises, his own emotion, and how his first declaration of love had been at Sorrento, the sequel, the blessed sequel, to a song that died away into silence over the moonlit sea?

How often since had he praised her voice! How often! Was that praise now the portion of another? Was he to love again? To be loved as *she* had loved him?

She had her visions, like Ailie, but oh, how different! She saw her noble Douglas in those blessed happy days. She saw the dreamy love in his eyes while listening to some favourite ballad: the silent thankful smile of approval and delight

as it ended. She felt the pressure of his cordial hand.

Once, so vivid and so painful was the vision of all this given to another, that with a sharp wailing cry she stood up in her lonely chamber, extending her arms in despair; calling wildly on the absent,—‘Oh love! oh husband! oh Douglas!’ till Lady Charlotte came in, flurried and frightened, in her white muslin dressing-gown, and asked her what had happened; and pitied her, but also scolded her, for ‘letting her mind dwell so on a man who after all had been so *very* ungrateful and foolish; yes, *foolish*, she must say so, and she didn’t care who heard her, or thought the contrary; and she wished she had never seen Sir Douglas, nor Kenneth, nor any of the Rosses, for they were worse than ghosts or demons, and had brought nothing but misfortune into the family.’

And all this Gertrude kept in her aching heart when writing to Lorimer, as he kept also in his angry heart the announcement of the same news by his mother, who triumphed and sneered, and called Sir Douglas ‘a very gay old gentle-

man,' and said, 'it was a pity when folk didn't know their own mind ; and if they chose to have young wives instead of just being content with a good nurse and a flannel nightcap, they should put up more quietly with the consequences : that was *her dictum*.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Frere's Lodgings Detected.

THE most humble instruments are sometimes the means of Heaven's perpetual wrath.

In the midst of Frere's charming *séjour* at Paris, his daily feasts, his nightly carouses, his 'quips and cranks and wreathèd smiles,' and delightful companionship with his wealthy young dupe; a little commonplace accident once more sent him into space, a forlorn and hunted vagabond, ready for all chances which Ailie might prepare, or his luckless destiny entail on him.

The young lordling looked out for a courier 'with excellent recommendations.' He found one. The courier especially recommended to him,—an Italian, speaking very good English and French; active, energetic, and having lived already not only as courier but in regular service

in an English family; an affectionate devoted sort of fellow, who had nursed his master in illness, and energetically attended him in health,—presented himself for examination and inspection.

The lordling was pleased, and so was the courier. The engagement was made; the day of departure fixed; the route planned, and nearly decided upon.

To end all uncertainty on this latter point, the 'most amusing fellow in the world,' the Marquis de los Frios, who was to be travelling companion and friend on the occasion, was called in.

The courier looked eagerly at the Marquis, and his countenance fell.

The Marquis also looked at the courier.

'Signor Frere!'

The mock Marquis would fain have braved out the recognition; but to be recognised now was not the light matter it might have been in former days. He stood his ground with admirable self-possession while in the presence of the courier and his new master. If a man could have been cheated out of his very senses, the courier would have faltered in his conviction, so perfect

was Frere's unconscious bearing ; so excellent his broken English mixed with words of Spanish origin. But the courier was our old friend Giuseppe, the coral diver of Naples. His bold, sun-burnt, honest, handsome countenance quailed not, nor altered one jot as he gazed in Frere's face.

When the latter left the room 'to fetch a journal in which there were maps of the route he had formerly taken by Switzerland to Italy,' Giuseppe rapidly and resolutely laid bare all he knew of the impostor thus suddenly met again after a pause of years. The incredulity of the lordling was great—so great, that with the happy sauciness of boyhood he rose at last, saying, 'Will you stay here, my good fellow, and let Los Frios just confront you, and put you down with an unvarnished account of himself? If you weren't yourself a foreigner, you'd know that this gentleman couldn't be English ; couldn't, because he hardly speaks English well enough to be understood, unless one was used, as I am, to this sort of lingo.'

And so the young lord left Giuseppe, patiently waiting ; and did not try his patience long, but returned in about five minutes with a puzzled

exclamation of 'By Jove!' which comprised all he liked to say on the occasion, having found Frere, *alias* Los Frios, departed; and a pencilled note in a very neat gentleman-like hand, informing him, that remittances *not* having yet arrived from Madrid, and these sort of stories being embarrassing for a stranger, and most difficult to disprove in a place where one had no acquaintances, he had thought it best to renounce the idea of their mutual tour, and go at once to Spain. That he was sure, under the circumstances, his friend would find no fault with his availing himself of a portion of a bag of Napoleons obtained for travelling purposes the day before. He had not yet counted the pieces he had borrowed, but would do so in the railway carriage, and strenuously advised him to be very cautious as to the man who had pretended to recognise him (Frere), for he never saw the man before in his life, and he must have had some motive in thus endeavouring to get rid of a third party on their travels.

And now James Frere did really come to London, having cleverly arranged to *dérouter* the police in Paris, by taking a ticket by rail for

Madrid, and ostentatiously showing himself at the proper station for such a start.

How or when he disappeared from that station no one could have said. But an infirm old gentleman arrived by the Havre packet for Southampton the night of that day, and from Southampton went to London, very anxiously and timidly asking his fellow-passengers to recommend some quiet hotel, and advise him about lodgings, having just arrived from America on anxious business which might detain him some time in the great metropolis. And he also begged to know where was the best place to get American money changed, for, though he had, of course, bills on bankers in England, yet he would be glad to get dollars and such like turned into silver; as to Australian sovereigns, he believed they were good and correct for use in England. And both dollars, and notes, and sovereigns were displayed, and much good-natured assistance tendered in the way of advice; and the infirm old gentleman accepted the card of one of his advisers, who kindly offered to call next day and see if he was comfortable, and if he could do anything for the stranger; and then the old gentleman got

into a cab, and was driven to an eating-house, from which, having taken some refreshment, he sauntered forth on foot, and turned to cross Waterloo Bridge. He paused on the bridge, and leaned over, looking into the water. Wrapt in contemplation he seemed, and of a sorrowful character, for he often sighed, and covered his face with his hands.

And as the various passengers over the bridge passed on, and others succeeded, a magical change came over his face, and, when he turned once again to cross the bridge in the opposite direction, though still elderly, he was no longer infirm, but a jolly, radiant sort of personage, who looked about him, and could have taken part at a moment's notice in a frolic or a fray, and paid a saucy compliment to any unprotected female he met.

But Ailie saw him! patient was the watch she kept, as he tried one lodging after another; patient the ear that listened when he told the landlady where at last he fixed himself, that he was 'dining out with some friends, and would return at night,' and handed her an earnest in advance on the price of his lodgings before he walked away. The red cross that marked the

doors in the fatal days of the Great Plague of London told no surer tale of certain death and misery, than the invisible notice from Ailie's watchful gaze on the door of that house.

At last! At last he was earthed. Another night; or less; *half* a night; enough of night to put an end to whatever wassail he was about to engage in, and bring him back to the trap set for him, and shut out all hope of escape.

She had only now to go and communicate with the police.

That was all.

And with the swift scudding that took her over the long sands by the Black Gang Chine, she threaded her way through the crowd, reached the police station, and laid her information.

Frere's lodging was detected. His fate was sealed.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Ailie Baffled.

IT is not only in pleasant things that the proverb holds good, 'There's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip.' Ailie was doomed once more to be disappointed. Frere never returned to those lodgings: although the forfeit money remained with his expecting landlady, and that personage, after pondering much over the question, 'Why tarry the wheels of his *cab*?' supplied his place with another lodger; keeping a pleasant little apology ready cut and dry, to be offered (with her unlet second floor) should the defaulter turn up in a few days, and the delay turn out to be 'a case of illness or something.'

But Frere was by no means ill. His wavering star was once more for a while in the ascendant.

He had made another *rencontre* as he walked towards the parks, certain not to be recognised.

He met his Creole wife.

She was walking, handsomely dressed, from the gate of Kensington Gardens to a carriage.

He did exactly what Ailie had conceived possible; he resolved to appeal to her compassion.

‘Stop, for God’s sake,’ he whispered. ‘I am James Frere; I have wandered in disguise for days, in hopes to see you’ (this was a pleasant fable). ‘You can denounce me; but I am your son’s father; a miserable man’ (here she paused, and faltered in her march onward. He saw it, and continued eagerly and sadly); ‘a man worn out with life’s struggles; ready to die, but not by the hangman’s hands. Turn back into the garden! Give me ten minutes for dear life’s sake. You shall never be troubled with me more, Anita, after that!’

Abject, humble, imploring; the great dark eyes she dared not meet, fixed in greedy scrutiny and hope of pity on her downcast face.

She paused—she hesitated—she turned and re-entered the gardens with Frere at her side. He led to a solitary bench under some trees; and

there he pleaded with the woman who had once loved him, and mourned his desertion with bitter tears.

Plausible, fiery, eloquent,—a most consummate master of all the tricks of speech by which favour can be won or condemnation averted; he made way once more into the yielding heart that listened. He falsified his whole life; his reasons for leaving her, his trials and persecutions, his long imprisonments, the anger of her relations. As to love, he had known other women, but never really loved except herself. He asked for no love—only aid to escape to America or the West Indies. She could give it. She could be his saviour, his guardian angel. Some day, when her boy was old enough to understand, he would bless her a thousand times over for saving *him* from the heritage of indelible shame consequent on the disgrace and despair of his father. The smuggler's death need not be the horror to her that it was to the Englishwomen who witnessed it. Only in England is such a calm value set on human life. Thousands of soldiers die on the field as suddenly. Every bullet has its billet. He did not mean to slay the man, but to shake himself free: he was

maddened and bewildered by meeting *her*. He scarce knew what he did at the time. Any way, if he was the veriest wretch that ever burdened earth, she had loved him once, and by that love and by her child's life he besought her pity! And nothing more. So that, in the onward years when she was happy and blest,—she might think of the miserable wanderer who had gone to die in the Far West, and rejoice that she, at least, had had compassion in the sorest need of his hunted and persecuted life.

'I live,' she said at last, 'in Manchester Square. Take an apartment near there, and I will come and see you, and talk of possible things and ships that will sail soon.' There was a pause, and she added in a low voice, 'Do not be miserable.'

Do not be miserable. *She* did not belong to the class of women who slay Jason's children to punish Jason. She had melted. The exulting blood bounded in the man's heart. Gaining so much he might yet gain more.

But Ailie had also thought over 'possibilities.' And among those possibilities she classed the meeting with this lost Anita. She had ascertained her name, or the name she went by, from the

people of the hotel in the Isle of Wight, and her address in London.

The day came, and the hour, when Frere was once more within reach of the cat-like spring. He had not left in any ship. He was in the lodging near Manchester Square, and Ailie, prowling near the Creole's house, saw her go forth in the late dim hours always in one direction. Then she made sure that Frere would fall into her hands. She watched — and watched — and watched.

Oh! not in vain this time. She saw him: saw him looking from the balcony of a well-built comfortable house, and saw the Creole enter.

Ailie never prayed, or she might have prayed then to keep her senses, so fluttering and leaping were the pulses of heart and brain. Afraid to leave and miss him as on that former occasion, she stood wistfully considering, and looking about for a policeman on his beat to call the detective who was watching in Manchester Square.

She saw one advancing, and went swiftly up to him. She spoke in a hurried breathless tone: 'In there,' (pointing to the house) 'lives the man who committed that murder in the Isle of Wight ;

you will get a reward : here is the placard, go in and take him.'

While the man stood hesitating, muttering something in a doubtful and surprised tone about a 'warrant,' and 'speaking to the sergeant of the force,' the Creole passed out again. Her veil was down, and she moved slowly and sadly with her handkerchief to her face as though weeping. Her dress brushed lightly against Ailie's as she went by, and the latter drew back from the contact with an angry shudder.

'Go in now ; the servant girl is still standing at the open door : there is a large reward, I tell you. Here is your sergeant coming.'

The detective at this moment joined them. The two men advanced, and Ailie followed. They passed together up the stairs and opened the door of the sitting-room. Frere sat at the writing-table, with his back to them, apparently too intent on his occupation to notice the intrusion.

The detective moved forward a pace or two, touched him on the shoulder, and stepped back again, as if prepared for any show of resistance he might offer. But nothing of the kind seemed impending. He rose quietly and silently, and turning

round slowly, faced Ailie Ross. She gave a cry, and darted to the door.

‘It is not the right person,’ she exclaimed. ‘They have changed clothes: he has escaped! Follow him: he cannot have gone far! *This is a woman!*’

‘Yes,’ said the Creole, as she fixed her large dark eyes scornfully on Alice; ‘I am a woman, though I wear the garb of a man; and you, you are a tigress, perhaps, though you wear the *garb of a woman*. He saw you from his balcony. He saw you!’

CHAPTER XXX.

Gertrude is Called to a strange Sick Bed.

IT was some days after this strange scene that Gertrude was lying quietly on the sofa in Lady Charlotte's drawing-room on a Sunday evening; reading extracts with Neil from an album lent to him by Mrs. Cregan.

'Mother, darling,' the boy said with a smile, 'this is just the book for you. Here's a whole batch of things about the Poor.'

Treatment of the Poor in Workhouses; Impvidence of the Poor; Texts recommending the Poor to our loving Care; Debts of the Poor, and Payment by instalments; Amusements of the Poor. Oh, I say, I like that,—*amusements* of the poor! Do they go to plays and pantomimes, I wonder? Oh, no,—here it is,—it's all about walks and fresh air, and opening of gardens and so forth.

Here, here's rather an interesting bit ; I'll read it to you, darling mother ; you lie still. Is your shawl over your feet ? Not too heavy ? Good. Now then, here goes. It is somebody writing about opening the Botanical Garden in Edinburgh on Sundays, and he says :—

‘I think that when the educated undertake, even “on principle,” to curtail the innocent pleasures of the uneducated, they should consider whether the deprivation is the same to the two classes. I affirm that it is *not* the same. The educated man, the scholar, has perpetual gardens in his memory, in his books, in association of cultivated ideas. The uneducated or half-educated man depends on the positive, on the visual, for enjoyment ; and in a still more intense measure do the poor require the positive and visual. An educated scholar may pass a Sunday in his study easily, in meditation and prayer. A poor mechanic *cannot*. The other is richer than he. Not only richer in the fact that he has a warmer house, more adorned apartments, the power of ordering some vehicle if the weather be downpouring when he wishes to shift the scene,—but richer in *ideas*. The educated man condemns

the uneducated man to a certain number of blank hours when he deprives him of outward associations. Set a child to meditate. A child *cannot* meditate, nor bear the oppression of unoccupied time beyond a very brief period. Neither can the poor man. His holiday is as necessary to his soul as a meal to his body. His hungry spirit lives on simple things. Your educated mind feeds on complex things, which he cannot obtain. Like the sick man,

‘The common air, the earth, the skies,
To him are opening Paradise.’

‘It may be a fit occupation for *you* to sit through the day without such refreshment. You see the wonders of God in thought. Let him see them where God set them for His simpler creatures. The flowers that bud and die, holding a sermon in their very hearts,—the grass that withereth away like a man’s life,—is the contemplation of such things a sinful pleasure, because to him a more intense and rare enjoyment than to you? When he beholds with wonder the pitcher-plant,—emblem of the fountain in an arid desert,—can you make *him* consider it a common thing, as it is to you who have seen it and read of it a

hundred times? Or will seeing that wonder of God on his one leisure day make him less pious, less inclined to muse on the works of God, the Creator, in such spare moments as he has?

‘I repeat it, the educated and uneducated do not meet on even terms, in these denials of recreation.

‘That which is pleasure to you, to them is nought—a strain of thought that only perplexes. You cannot fill the weak vessel with that spiritual wine; it would break and burst. God made religion simple; a thing for babes and sucklings; to comfort the dying cottager; to be a hope to the ignorant beggar. Man makes religion complex; and spins cobwebs of his own thin laws round the broad and manifest law of God. Those who take Scripture texts for warrant against innocent Sabbath recreation, are like those who take Scripture texts to prove that they know the set term and duration of this mortal globe. As, in the very book from whence prophecies are culled to prove at what date our world shall be destroyed, we are expressly told that God keeps that secret even from the angels,—so, in the very book Sabbatarians quote, they

are expressly told that "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

'For those who would argue on the wretched narrow ground of mere task-work; who say, "Oh! we can't have gardens opened where watchers and gatekeepers must be employed," there is an answer so easy that it is a wonder so much dispute can be maintained on such a sandy foundation.

'Parks, gardens, lodges,—houses with gatekeepers, gardeners, porters, and servants,—are in constant occupation all over Great Britain on the Sabbath day. If the poor man may not have his walk in the Botanical Garden because a gatekeeper must let him in,—why should a fine lady's coachman drive her to church, or for an airing? Why should any servant in any house be troubled with any common duty? Why should not the whole machinery of life stand still till Monday morning? If the answer be, 'These other things are necessary; the poor man or mechanic's walks in these gardens are not,'—I say, neither are the things of which I made mention, necessary; they are harmless, they are habitual, but they are *not* necessary. Some are positive luxuries; all bear

an exact analogy to the recreation for which the occupying of a few gatekeepers is required.

‘In the city of Edinburgh, where so fierce a denunciation against harmless Sabbath recreation is for ever going on; group after group of filthy drunken creatures lie lounging in the public way, to the scandal and dread of the passers-by,—even on and about flights of steps leading to chapels where their most eloquent men and earnest preachers rivet the attention of more decent hearers.

‘Such groups are never seen on continental Sabbaths; not even in Paris, that most dissolute of cities; and in the country towns and villages of foreign lands such scenes are positively unknown.

‘These stricter Sabbath rules, and the vehement battle of sects as to how to keep God’s day holy, do not make Scotland a more moral country. Drunken in a greater measure than other countries,—fierce in crime,—she can scarcely point to the evidence of her training, as proof of the success of her theories; and, peradventure, it would be a blessed change there, if, in lieu of Sabbatarian discussion, there was such Sabbath recreation as might lead the mind of man neither to sen-

sual pleasure nor to burning disputation, but to those scenes which lift him—

“ From nature up to nature's God.” ’

‘ Well, now, I think that is all very true,’ observed Neil, as he paused to take breath. ‘ Don’t you think it is true, darling mother ?’

‘ Yes, I do, Neil. I think it true, and just, and I heartily wish it could become the universal opinion !’

‘ Ah ! yes, but there are such pig-headed people in this world ! People whose understandings really seem to be turned upside down. Lady Clochnaben, mother, is an upside-down woman. She is always wrong, and always thinks she is right. It is a pity we can’t pack a few moderate sensible thoughts on the top of her mind, and then ticket her, “ This side uppermost.” But she will never be converted.’

Neil paused a moment, and then added, with a slight degree of hesitation :—

‘ I think a woman should be very kind and gentle. I don’t know what would become of the poor at Clochnaben and Torrieburn if it were not for Effie and Mrs. Ross-Heaton. They can’t give

much money, you know, but Effie reads, and Mrs. Ross-Heaton makes capital broth for them, and altogether they are very good to them. And mother, do you know I overheard Mrs. Cregan speaking of *you* yesterday to Lorimer Boyd, when he called after arriving in London from Vienna. She said she thought you looked so ill; but you were still busy, and she believed a special blessing from God would rest on your head, because of your unwearied goodness to the poor.'

A slight flush tinged Gertrude's cheek and brow.

'My boy, Mrs. Cregan is a very generous warm-hearted woman; and she says many kind things of me and others.'

'But don't you believe it, mother? Don't you believe in the special blessing? I do. They thought I was not attending, but I heard her. Those were her very words. I do think, when your dear name is mentioned, I sprout a couple of extra ears; I seem to have four instead of two. I can hear all down a long dinner-table if they speak of you. And I feel so proud of you, mother; I know you are so good, so far beyond all other women. I feel I could thank God every day for making me your son and my father's.'

A moan escaped the pale lips he bent to kiss; and that wild appeal—‘Oh! my Neil!’ which Lady Charlotte had complained was spoken ‘in a tone that made one’s heart ache,’ and was ‘so unreasonable, and so unlike dear Gertie,’ once more puzzled and pained the sensitive lad by her side.

He was silent for a minute or two. He asked for no explanation; but bent anew over his book. A smile played presently round his full young mouth. ‘Oh, mother here is such a quaint little bit. I must read it to you. Listen now. I don’t know what it is about, except that it is still something respecting the poor. It is quoted from some very old pamphlet called the “Petition of the Poor Starving Debtor,” printed in 1691, and advising that we should subscribe to pay the debts of the poor. And it says, “Such charity is an act of great piety towards Almighty God; who requireth it of us. For He hath left the poor as His pupils or wards, and the rich as His stewards or guardians, to provide for them. It is one of those great tributes that He justly requires from the rest of mankind, which, because they cannot pay Him, He hath scattered the Poor

amongst them to be His substitutes and receivers."

'And here's a little bit against pride; a curious little bit; saying, that in Charles the First's time, noblemen and gentlemen thought it a very good provision for their younger sons, to bind them apprentice to the rich merchants.'

'Well, I can't say I should like to be taking an inventory of bales of silk and sacks of coffee instead of shooting and fishing at Glenrossie. I think if I had lived in that mercantile day I should have taken my cat, like Whittington, and gone to seek my fortune.'

'It was the cat that went; Whittington stayed in London,' said Gertrude, smiling; 'so you would have had to be patient and industrious before you even came to be Lord Mayor; which seems to have been then considered what the present population of Paris deem it now: the greatest dignity in the world.'

'Well, I trust I should have attained to it; and Effie and I would have come to visit you in long crimson and blue robes as represented in the story books. Poor Effie! I hope a letter will come to-

morrow. Cousin Kenneth was scarcely so well when she last wrote.'

Gertrude sighed, and leaned back on her pillow. Thought, which is lightning quick, once more took her through those days at the Villa Mandórlo, and the more fatal scenes at Glenrossie, and so floated her soul away to her lost Douglas; and his health; and the singing of that unknown, — whose voice 'was one of the sweetest he had ever heard.'

Neil, too, sat musing. His boyish spirit was out far away over the hills, in the moonlight, bidding weary little Cousin Effie a sorrowful good-bye.

So there was deep silence in that luxurious room, where the clear boyish voice with its earnest intonation had been lately reading those extracts respecting the poor. Silence deep and unbroken.

All of a sudden the door was hurriedly opened, and Lady Charlotte with an open note in her hand, and an expression of anxiety and perplexity on her weak little face, came in exclaiming—'Now I do hope and insist, Gertie, that you spare yourself, and don't go!'

‘Don’t go where, little mother?’

‘It is a letter from that widow, the mother of Jamie Mackinnon who used to be at Torrieburn you know, that poor Mr. Heaton was so good to ——’

‘Yes, dear mother; she has had to struggle for a livelihood lately. I have seen a good deal of her. She is doing better. Jamie’s apprenticed; and she takes in lodgers in a humble way.’

‘That’s just it, Gertie, that’s just what’s so ungrateful. I mean after you have helped her, and put her in a way of having lodgers, to send for you in this sort of way to see one of them! Why should you see a lodger? I want you to rest, and take care of yourself, and she sends urgently requesting you to see lodgers! Pray don’t see a lodger. Let her send for the doctor. That’s much better.’

‘Let me see her note, dear mother,’ said Gertrude, with a smile, half weary and half compassionate. ‘If any one is ill I ought to go—it is in my district.’

‘District! Now, my own darling Gertie, *are* you a clergyman? Besides, a lodger does not belong to *any* district; and you see she says he is

strangely ill; well, is not that more the doctor's business than yours? If he's *strangely ill*, you may not know what to do, or what is the matter with him, a bit better than she does; and it may be something catching. And it's a man. I wouldn't mind so much if it were a woman; but really, after the Isle of Wight—though to be sure there are not so many smugglers in London, only I think—oh, Gertie, *don't go!*' exclaimed Lady Charlotte, getting quite entangled in the network of her own rapid sentences, and suddenly breaking off, 'Don't, *pray* don't!'

But Gertrude had risen from her sofa, and stood folding the note in her fingers, and looking very grave and resolute. She stooped and kissed her mother's cheek tenderly, and said, 'Do not be over anxious for me, my mother. If it were God's will that I should suffer for doing His work, I should not escape by neglecting it. I solemnly promised—(and I am only one of many who visit in the same way)—that I would come, when called, to the sick or dying. The person lodging with Mrs. Mackinnon appears to be dying, and dying very miserably and uncomfortably; he has told her he has not a friend in the world. I must

go to him. When the doctor comes I shall return. Do not fear for me more to-day than any other day.'

'You look more weary to-day—worse than ever,' said poor Lady Charlotte, with half a sob.

'I was a good deal agitated talking over matters with Lorimer Boyd, you know; I had not seen him for a very long time. But I have been lying down, and am quite rested and strong again. Neil has been reading to me.'

'Ah! I am sure *he* doesn't think you ought to risk your health in the way you do!'

The boy looked eagerly up from his book, as if he had not caught the drift of the reference made to him. His mother smiled.

'Neil, on the contrary, has got a beautiful creed from Mrs. Cregan, that a special blessing rests on me during these visits.'

Neil started to his feet, and threw his eager arms round her.

'I *do* believe it; I do believe God keeps special blessings for those who are like you. You always seem to me like one of the beautiful pale saints in pictures, and what you think right to

do, seems to me the only right. God bless your visit and you, dear mother. May I come?’

‘No, my Neil; but I will not be long away.’

Not long? It seemed to Lady Charlotte an interminable visit; and her prophecy of evil was apparently fulfilled to the letter, when a hurried pencilled note came from her daughter, saying that the person she had visited was said to have a bad sort of fever, and she thought best, for Neil’s sake, not to return home at all, till the medical man had made out what ailed him.

More Gertrude did not tell that weak but loving mother. For what there was to tell besides, would have driven her half-distracted with pain and terror!

When Lady Ross reached the obscure lodging where Mrs. Mackinnon earned her scanty livelihood, she found the poor old Scotchwoman in a panic scarcely to be described. She led her, —thanking her at every step,—up the little creaking staircase into the small clean room. There, stretched on a bed, panting, with swollen features, his head so closely shaved as to be entirely bald, and a long auburn wig dank and soaked with water, on the pillow by him,—lay

‘the lodger’ whom she had been called to see. He had fallen in the river, Mrs. Mackinnon said, and all his things were wet; and she had not known he wore a wig till it slipped off; and she had left it there, not daring to touch anything: afraid of the man.

‘Do you feel very ill? Do you wish any one sent for, who would know you? Have you no friends with whom I can communicate? Medical assistance will be here directly.’

So spoke the sweet grave voice; and the sweet serious eyes waited to see the wretched being turn and answer, if indeed he was sensible.

In a moment he turned with a struggle, grasping the bed-clothes with his hand; sat upright in bed, and looked wildly in Gertrude’s face.

His aspect was inconceivably horrible. A sort of purple pallor overspread his skin; his bald head gave yet darker expression to his great lustrous eyes; his mouth was swollen and half open; he had the expression of one who strives with a frightful dream. She had seen him before; but where?

Gertrude gazed, wondering; she endeavoured to command herself, but nature was too strong;

she suddenly gave a wild shriek, and covered her face with her hands.

‘Don’t leave me ! don’t abandon me ! have pity !’ gasped the man, clutching now at her dress. ‘Something ails me more than common—some horrible stroke of death. Don’t leave me, and I’ll make you bless the hour—don’t !’

Gertrude slowly uncovered her face.

‘Fear nothing from me,’ she said ; ‘I will neither leave you, nor betray you. I know you. You are JAMES FRERE !’

A groan was the only answer ; but there was a look of wild appeal in his eyes, such as the hunted stag at bay gives when the dogs have fastened their fangs in his side.

‘I won’t leave you till the doctor comes,’ repeated Gertrude ; ‘and I will return early to-morrow.’

‘I may not be here to-morrow ; stay by me now. I have something to tell you before death chokes my life out.’

CHAPTER XXXI.

Hunted Down at Last!

THAT eventful Sunday evening happened to be one (among many such) which the Dowager Clochnaben devoted to contradicting her son Lorimer. She had not had a favourable opportunity for contradicting him for a considerable period. He had been away at Vienna; and it is difficult to carry on arguments by letter if your correspondent obstinately omits all answer to the topic in dispute.

A Clochnaben 'dictum' that Heaven would probably visit the capital of Austria 'with fiery vials of wrath' on account of Strauss's waltzes being performed by military bands in the gardens there 'on the Lord's-day,' had always been passed over by him in his replies *sub silentio*, to her very

great indignation; and she now recovered her opportunity for its discussion.

The occasion seemed certainly hard upon Lorimer, as the match which lit the gunpowder of her stored-away and slumbering wrath was a *cadeau* offered by himself; an almanac enamelled and encrusted with turquoise and garnets, in that style of Viennese workmanship in which the sinful admirers of Strauss and of military music so greatly excel.

‘Humph!’ said the Dowager, as she grimly planted the almanac on the chimney-piece, ‘I see they mark the Sunday (in their absurd foreign lingo) in the list of days, just as if they kept it.’

‘Well, they do keep it, in their own way.’

‘Yes, so you told me, and a pretty way, too; banging drums, and playing on fifes and trombones and ophicleides, in the ears of all passers-by; and encouraging folk that ought to be hearing something very different, to dawdle up and down listening to their heathen clatter.’

‘My dear mother, I’m sure I wish, if it could be more agreeable to you, that they played on shawms and dulcimers and timbrels—whatever timbrels may be.’

‘That’s right, Lorimer, make a sinful jest of it! Little *you* care for the desecration of the Lord’s-day. I believe you actually prefer your wicked Continental Sabbaths to the decent Sabbaths of Scotland, which you were taught to reverence, so long as *I* nurtured you in the way of the Lord.’

‘Well, I confess I feel very much weaned from that nurture, my dear mother. And, having seen Sabbaths now, in Lisbon, Paris, Vienna, Florence, Naples, Marseilles, Milan, and a number of other towns, I must say for their wicked inhabitants, that in no single instance, either among a rough mercantile seafaring population; or a simple and ignorant peasantry; or a luxurious and idle aristocracy, have I ever witnessed anything approaching, in the remotest degree, to the indecent desecration undergone by that day in your paradise of Sabbatarians,—my native Scotland.’

‘Those that won’t look certainly can’t be expected to *see*’—retorted the Dowager, with a sniff of indignation; ‘and it’s my belief you’d say you saw nothing wrong if a fair or a cattle-show were held on the Sabbath-day, and a ball given in the evening.’

‘You are mistaken, my dear mother. But I am not about to enter into “the vexed Bermoothes” of that whirlpool of argument as to how much, or how little, relaxation and recreation are permissible on Sundays. The Dervishes of the East believe they best pay respect to their Deity by the monotonous exercise of twirling round on one toe, or hanging by their elbows to a suspended staff, like flying-foxes and sleeping bats, or by the yet more passive service of letting their nails grow to a portentous length ; and the Dervishes of the North may have their own notions of the extent of monotony agreeable to the Great Creator of infinite variety ; to the God who sends millions on millions of men hourly into the world, no two of whom are so alike in understanding, aspect, voice, or bearing, but that their fellow-creatures shall know them apart, and acknowledge a distinction and difference between them. I leave all that source of dispute, and I merely persist that the “Continental Sabbath,” as you call it, is much more decently and inoffensively kept than the Scottish Sabbath.’

‘The Scottish Sabbath is much obliged to you, I’m sure !’

‘ Well, you know, my dear mother, you yourself complain of the drunkenness, the vice, the pleasure-orgies, that go on even in your own neighbourhood there. Now I recommend you to make a little Continental tour ; and in the leisurely hours you may spend in a Viennese or Italian promenade, consider these alternative propositions. Either the Scotch are so innately and incorrigibly corrupt that no amount of teaching and preaching can bring them to spend their time decently on that particular day ; or, there is something radically wrong in the coercive rules you would lay down for their spending it. I am of the latter opinion.’

‘ Of course you are. We should spend our time in listening to drums and fiddles, and chattering balderdash, instead of going to church, I suppose ?’

‘ No ; but, in my opinion, it is the lack of any innocent and wholesome occupation or recreation that gives over the clay tenement containing a soul to the devil. “ He findeth it swept and garnished,” and steps nimbly in, with the minor devils of sensuality and drunkenness at his heels. The Continental Sabbath is a day of

prayer at intervals, from the early sunrise of matins to the tapit-lit evening mass. But it is also a day of recreation ; a day of enjoyment in the open air ; a day when men and women are not expected to shut eyes and ears to all but a nasal monotone of appeal or thanksgiving for blessings apparently granted entirely in vain. And now let us have no more of this, for I must go out, and leave you and the Austrian almanac to settle the matter between you. I promised to call on Lady Charlotte Skifton.'

'And that Sabbath saint, Lady Ross, I presume?'

'And on Gertrude Ross,' answered Lorimer, in his sternest tone.

'Well, then, you'll find neither,' retorted the Dowager, with a certain degree of triumph ; 'for I've just had a note from Lady Charlotte, and she'll be here directly,—ready to whimper, I suppose, as usual—with the boy Neil, who says you promised him a dog on your return. As to his mother, she has wisely gone to see some beggar in a fever, and daren't come back till she's consulted a doctor about infection. I sup-

pose you think *that* a fit employment for the Sabbath-day?’

‘Yes, I do; a very fit employment. “Whether is it better to do good or to do evil on the Sabbath-day?”—I lay no claim to originality in that last sentence.’

And a ‘grim smile’ curled round Lorimer Boyd’s mouth.

‘Oh! of course *you* approve. When people lose their characters, it’s a fine flourish to set up, going about doing good.’

Lorimer’s small stock of patience vanished in exasperation.

‘If,’ said he, bitterly, ‘she had joined that peculiar regiment of effete pleasure-seekers who deem themselves enrolled as God’s Own Dandies; with the Rhodopes, Messalinas, and Lesbias who are the *vivandières* of their religious camp; and who, as soon as enlisted, think themselves better able to teach and preach than all the regular clergy of Great Britain,—you might say so, mother. But, so far as I have known, Gertrude Ross has done good without seeking the reward of human approval; without setting herself up as judge or instructress; or copying those wonder-

ful professors of Christianity who are so struck and amazed at their own late conversion, that they must needs pass it round, like the bottle after dinner,—ignorant or incredulous of the patent fact, that long before they ever read a line of Scripture, the persons they ever read a line of Scripture, the persons they appeal to were already walking with God to the best of their ability.'

'You needn't be so violent,' sneered his mother, 'We all know you can't endure a word that doesn't worship Lady Ross.'

'I can't endure hypocrisy, wherever I find it, either in man or woman. I hate to see persons who are unfit to teach, teaching. I hate to see men who have led base lives, *kotooed* to, listened to, perhaps publicly thanked, when they ought to be degraded and forgotten; I hate to watch the vain struggle of the innocent to be justified; or the successful effort of the deceiver to be set on high. I consider such reversal of God's clear justice to be the true translation of "taking His name in vain." I hate——'

But what more Lorimer meant to denounce—while his mother angrily watched his fierce intellectual countenance, ready with a keenly-sharpened answer as soon as his voice should pause—cannot be

known; for at this juncture in came Lady Charlotte, 'ready to whimper,' as prophesied by her scornful relative, and Neil, who threw back his eager head in Lorimer's warm embrace, and said laughingly,—

'*I'm* come with Mamma Charlotte, entirely out of avarice and self-interest. Where's my dog?'

'Here,' said Lorimer, with a smile so sweet and kindly that it scarcely seemed the face of the same man who had just been speaking. 'Here! and a smart little fellow he is, with your name as owner already engraved on his collar. You must train him to English, for he is only used to German: and don't begin by delivering him over to some groom to clip his ears and tail, as if, among other improvements of the works of creation, God didn't know how to make a terrier. And now, where is your dear mother?'

Neil lifted his rosy mouth from the passionate kiss of welcome he was imprinting on the terrier's forehead, and said, 'She's gone to see a poor man who is ill.'

'But where *is* the poor man?'

'Ah—here's the address,' and Neil dived

into his pocket, and pulled out with sundry other small articles a somewhat battered little memorandum-book, which he presented to Lorimer with one hand, while still caressing the dog with the other.

Lorimer took his hat.

‘Where are you going now?’ said Lady Clochnaben. ‘Lady Ross is not returned.’

‘I’m going to break the Lord’s day by looking after that beggar,’ said her son, as he closed the door and disappeared.

A thrill of something as like alarm and concern as her nature permitted, ran through the iron bosom of the grim Dowager. She had been listening to Lady Charlotte’s querulous terrors during the presentation of the dog to his young master, and felt the truth of her whimpering cousin’s observation, that ‘*It must* be something very particularly dreadful, or Gertie would not stay the night away from home.’

‘Run after him,’ she said to Neil,—‘but no; it is of no use to ask him to stay for *my* behest. Fair faces are the devil’s best tools. And your daughter’s one of them,’ added she, turning suddenly and with exceeding fierceness to poor Lady

Charlotte; whose whimpering thereupon broke into sobs.

While they argued, Lorimer stalked forth, and, taking the first cab he could meet with, drove rapidly to the obscure lodgings of the old Scotchwoman.

Many and many a year afterwards he still saw vividly, as he saw it then, the scene which presented itself to his eyes.

There was more light in the small room than ever had lit the humble apartment before, each of the hurried visitants having merely set down the candle furnished to them. The doctor was there, and Gertrude, and that Creole wife, unknown by sight to Lorimer; the terrified old Scotchwoman; and the 'neighbour' who had done the office of a servant in attending to the house-door, and who, now following Lorimer with another light, had left that and the room-door alike open.

That he had come during the last gasp of a horrible death-scene was Lorimer's instant impression. Gertrude was kneeling by the blind-looking, purple, bloated object, stretched panting on the bed. The Creole was standing near her, weeping, her face hid in her hands. The doctor

and those others present, all gazing with fixed yet shrinking scrutiny on the dying man; the light falling full upon him and them, though flickering, torch-like, in the draught of air from the narrow staircase.

As Lorimer moved with an exclamation of painful anxiety towards Gertrude, another group appeared at the gaping doorway.

AILIE was there, with two policemen!

Her little hands were lifted and clenched in front of her slender person, like two little claws ready to pounce. There was no more escape for James Frere. The thirst of vengeance could now be quenched by a long satisfying draught. He was hunted down at last!

She stood for a moment as if scarcely understanding the reality of what was passing; those little feline hands still suspended in their odd attitude of seizure, with her eyes glitteringly fixed on the Creole.

'Take him!' at last she said, in a sharp, short whisper. 'Take him!' and she turned her head to the men behind her.

Lorimer Boyd, roused by the words and the movement, looked up, looked towards her, while

the group round the bed remained absorbed in the agony before them.

‘Wretched woman,’ said he, ‘the man is *dead* whom you would have trapped and taken!’

DEAD!

James Frere had escaped her after all.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Retribution.

AS Ailie turned, and fled with a hoarse cry from the death-chamber, Gertrude rose slowly to her feet, and looked round as in a trance. A wild, unnatural, ecstatic smile was on her face. It changed a little, a certain degree of consciousness was in it, as she espied Lorimer.

She moved towards him with an effort like one who walks in sleep.

‘Look!’ she said, in an odd whisper, as strange as her countenance, ‘look!’ and she held up a roll of battered and crushed papers, gravel-stained and torn.

The picture of Gertrude standing thus, in the wavering light that beat to and fro as if it had something of the triumph of life in it, never left Lorimer’s memory; nor the strange effect of the

same flickering and moving radiance passing over the deathly stillness of the bed; over the dark-shadowed eyes of the dead man, his bald discoloured shaven skull, and his thin knuckles clenched outside the sheets, with their deep indented scar more visible than ever on that white background.

He seized Gertrude's hands with a trembling grasp. 'Come away; oh! come away from this place,' he said.

'You should all go—go immediately,' said the doctor, as he gently and pityingly touched the sobbing Creole's shoulder. 'This man has died of the worst species of typhus; the "black fever" of the books. Leave the window wide open, and go, all of you, go! It is the strangest case I ever assisted at.'

In a minute or two more, all was hushed and darkened there; and the corpse of James Frere was left alone.

Lorimer led Gertrude forth. She neither wept, nor fainted, nor trembled—but once, when in his agony of anxiety he pressed her hands tightly in his own, she murmured—'Oh! I hope I shall not wake, and find it all a dream!'

Then, by degrees, the state of stupefaction seemed to melt away; she looked round at the room in the hotel where he was staying, into which he had brought her—thanked him—said ‘it was right not to take her to Neil,’—and in the effort to conclude the sentence, ‘It would be such bad news for Douglas if our boy was ill,’—the dark clouds of oppressive thought clashed together, and a shower of tears at once relieved and exhausted her!

Lorimer never spoke. He sat silently by; his arms folded tight across his broad chest, as if in resolute effort to avoid any ill-judged impulse to console, or check that convulsive fit of weeping.

She was the first to speak. She stretched her hand across, and laid it gently on his arm.

‘I have got **THAT LETTER!**’ she said, with white trembling lips. ‘I have recovered the letters they stole from me, to persuade Douglas I was false.’

Then she told him all; as she herself had learnt it from the wretched being whose strange and erring life had just ended. He had admitted every particular that Lorimer had already heard

respecting his career, to be true. He claimed to be Clochnaben's son when a young man carrying on a most dissipated career at college. Not that he had ever seen him as a child, or knew it till his mother's death, who had then assured him of it, and put into his hands Clochnaben's letters in those early days, full of protestations of everlasting attachment, and proving that her sole means of subsistence was an income received from her seducer.

Unaware of the sort of man with whom he had to deal, and not yet experienced in the world, he had rashly brought these letters and proofs to Clochnaben himself, with an appeal for support and fatherly protection. Clochnaben gave him fair words and specious promises, affecting to be much touched at re-perusing his own old love-letters,—got them into his possession by giving Frere a sum of money in exchange; and from the hour he had so deprived him of all means of corroborating the scandal, as he termed it, of his connexion with Frere's mother;—utterly denied that any such intimacy had ever existed,—and declared it was the invention of the young adventurer, whose career he nevertheless at first

attempted to arrange, by procuring foreign mercantile employment, and so getting rid of him.

It was years since he had received assistance from Richard Clochnaben, when he presented himself with the false and specious tale Gertrude might remember, at Clochnaben Castle. He had then escaped from gaol instead of a Roman Catholic seminary. Nothing was true except his privations, which had been very real. He brought with him two or three letters supposed to have been found among his mother's things *after* the major portion of the correspondence had been bought by Clochnaben. The latter instantly taxed him with the forgery; pointed out that he had not been at that time in England, nor at any place from whence they were dated; and declared that on the smallest further attempt to establish such relations between himself and Frere, he would deliver him up to justice, 'and see him swing with satisfaction.' Notwithstanding which declaration, and the rage he had shown, at the odd accident of invitation to supersede Heaton which had made Frere an inmate under the same roof, he had supplied him with a sum of money to facilitate his escape at.

the time the detective had come to Glenrossie, taking a dreadful oath never to repeat such assistance if he dared to return to Great Britain.

Frere had never since received one farthing of help, and had continued to 'live by his wits;' having drained every sixpence he could, from the infatuated Alice Ross.

'Hunted down at last' by that unexpected avenger, he had sought in vain an obscure asylum in the disguise of a travelling artist. Afraid of the police, who came suddenly upon him in a tavern while consulting with one of his former felon companions whom they were seeking, he had made one of his narrowest escapes by threading unusual streets and bye-lanes, and coming out at last on a narrow canal that ran by the suburbs. There he hastily hailed a barge that was slowly making its way past him, and giving a couple of shillings to the man in charge, asked for a passage, saying that he had been walking all the morning, and was footsore and fatigued. He lay down under shelter of some tarpaulin, and felt nearly suffocated by the strange and disagreeable odour of the cargo in the barge. He sat up and looked into the water, which appeared to him

dazzling with beautiful colours; he became perfectly giddy and insensible, and, on attempting to stand up, lost his balance, and fell over the unprotected ledge of the barge into the canal. He was assisted out, put into a cab, and was quite sensible enough after the immersion to give his address, and not sorry to have an excuse in his landlady's eyes for remaining in bed and in hiding. The dreadful smell, however, haunted him, and he was unable to eat anything either that day or the next. His eyes then became affected; small bladders of blood seemed to fill and weigh down the lids, and within a very brief period from the sending for Lady Ross, whom he recognised, he became blind, and the eyes presented a most dreadful appearance—bloodshot, blank, and staring. He told Gertrude he was certain he was dying from the inhalation of poisonous vapours on the barge; that his blindness was a judgment on him; confessed all, and referred her for a portfolio of papers to the Creole, whose address he gave.

She had listened at first incredulously to Gertrude's story, and seemed to think it some new attempt to entrap Frere, but at length

proposed to accompany Lady Ross, carrying the portfolio with her. From the mass of papers, drawings and plans, which he had feared to take when he fled from the vicinity of Manchester Square, he gave a packet, in which was the letter to Kenneth in the condition in which it had been originally found. He said that more than once lately he had considered whether he would not propose to *sell* it to Lorimer Boyd, or to Lady Ross herself, but was deterred by the fear of being given into custody; and that he was still casting about whom he could employ to transact that business when he was stricken by his strange malady. By the time his broken confession was over, and the doctor's examination made, he was insensible and dying; his body covered with suffused spots, his eyes a blank jelly-like mass.

The doctor had been of opinion that he died, as he had said, from inhaling poison, and that the poison was refuse matter from some gasworks on the banks of the canal.

He did not anticipate any fatal effects to those who had assisted the man in his horrible illness, as it arose from such peculiar causes; but they should be careful for some days.

And so ended Gertrude's agitated narration ; and at the close she lifted her weary, hopeful, lovely eyes to Lorimer, questioning both by words and looks how to get all this disclosed to Sir Douglas.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Invalided Home.

WHEN Lorimer had to make an avowal on his part, of being in possession of news painfully interesting to Gertrude.

Sir Douglas was ill; very ill: any very sudden agitation might be fatal to him: he was in fact invalided home; and Lorimer had already resolved to go out to him, and had written to try and secure the services of Giuscppe as an excellent sick nurse and attendant, and who on his return might be of use to Kenneth, of whose bodily condition late accounts had been unfavourable. Gertrude must put her patient trust in God as hitherto; and believe,—as Lorimer believed,—that she would receive her reward, even in this world, for all the faithful, uncomplaining tenderness with

which she had borne her hard lot as respected her husband.

So Lorimer departed ! And after her few days' anxious quarantine, Gertrude dwelt once more with her mother and her beloved Neil, and waited news from the Crimea.

Is it forgotten ? Is it faded to a sad dream, except with those who actually took part in it, that war, waged with disaster as much as with the armed foe ? That war in which, to the eternal glory of English courage, the heroism of endurance was proved equal to the heroism of action ; when youths and men and aged warriors, alike showed their willingness not only to die fighting for their country, but to die miserably, tediously, obscurely, for their country,—without either murmur or appeal. When beardless boys, taken from luxurious homes, served in the trenches and camped in wreaths of snow, and bore the awful change with eager gallantry ; till mothers made childless knew when the tidings reached them, that those they had so fondly cradled and so tenderly reared, had perished,—*killed* but not *conquered*, by the lingering and persistent hardships which had surrounded them.

Are the names *but* names now, of strange far-away places, known to us only by maps and sketches, where the best blood of England reddened the streams, or sank in the alien earth? Are they vanished like the thirst that was quenched in the Bulganiac river, after a burning and weary march, prelude to the war of the morrow: when men stood gazing, from the rugged and precipitous heights that crowned that river's banks, on the roots of willows mowed down in a bitter harvest, to prevent shelter or concealment of a foe; and three hundred yards of fire blazed in the distance, from the quiet village of Bouliok?

Is Alma but a vague melodious sound? where fording that unknown water, and marching straight into batteries held to be impregnable, we drove out five-and-forty thousand men before the sun marked three hours of time for the struggle? Do men still shudder at the tale of ever-memorable Balaklava; when, circled by a blaze of artillery, front, flank, and rear, the gallant horsemen rode to death at the word of a mistaken command, and left two-thirds of their number on the ground? Do the dull November mists of morning never bring to mind the fogs

of that miserable anxious dawn at Inkerman, when those who had worked in the trenches all night were suddenly called forth from their comfortless rest in tents or on the bare ground, to charge against barbaric foes; who mutilated the dead to avenge the bravery of the living?

Are our dreaming ears never haunted by floating watchwords through the night? brief sad sentences spoken by dying lips, whose farewells were given so far away?

‘Forward, 23d!’ shouts one young voice.—‘Stand firm, for the honour of England and the credit of the Rifles; firm, my men!’ cries another.—‘I will fight to the last!’ pants the brave but overpowered swordsman called upon to surrender as prisoner.—‘I do not move till the battle is won,’ exclaims the crippled hero who lay bleeding before Sebastopol, amongst guns still directed by him against the enemy!

Do we think, as our daily post comes happily in, or as we ourselves carelessly sit down at our writing-tables for an uneventful correspondence, of that charnel-house at Varna, and all the ‘last messages’ written by deputy for poor soldiers at Scutari, and on board the swarming troop-ships,

and in the miserable hospitals denuded of stores or fit appliances for the wounded? Do the stray scattered sentences return, recorded among a thousand others? when one writes, 'Praying my mother will not feel the misfortune of my death too much;' and another,—'Write to my father, he will best break this to my wife;'—while a third indites the triumphant date,—'Written on the field we have taken from the enemy!'

Do we yet mourn for the later, nearer deaths of those who came back to native land and pleasant homes; whose faces were once more dwelt on by loving tender eyes; whose hands were once more clasped by loving hands; but who were so worn and shaken by the past tempest of that wintry war, that, like nipped trees, they stood for a little while, and then succumbed and fell? Those who have not survived to win their laurels in future battles, but rest under the

'Cypress and yew,—sorrowful trees!'

of their own green land,—soldiers who died in time of peace, when the bitterness of death seemed ended; precious lives, whose loss left blanks in many a home, that never, never, can be filled.

Do we ever see, as we cross on a sunny day from the gardens opposite Buckingham Palace and the Horse Guards, a vision of the crowded Park, as it was on that thrilling day when such of our wounded heroes as had returned, passed before their Queen in thin lines,—receiving a medal and a word, for the life that was risked, and the health or the limb for ever lost,—and loyally saluting, amid the cheers of the crowd, the Ruler of the country in whose service they had bled?

Events follow events in this busy world of ours, as wave follows wave on the wide and restless sea,—too happy if they do not pass like those waves, leaving only here and there, a narrow heap of weed thrown up on the shore, where the landmarks of history stand.

How much is remembered, and how much forgotten,—how many are rewarded, and how many suffered to float away into oblivion and neglect,—is best known to those who should receive, and those who could bestow, the prizes that glitter in the eyes of the lovers of glory, and which should also be the recompense of all

who fight and suffer, even though some be willing to suffer, without such reward, for duty and conscience sake alone.

Sir Douglas was not among those who could claim the meed of fame that day. He had served his country well in many a past campaign, but the dreary hour had come to him, as to many another gallant heart, when he was compelled to own that the body could no longer obey the soul's behest; any more than the soldier, bleeding faintly to death on the battle-field, can rise to the sound of the bugle-call, and march with his comrades to victory.

In bed, or in a blanket on the ground in his tent; on board a crowded steamer borne to an hotel at Pera; looking forward at one time only to a grave at Scutari; rallying a little, and struggling so far with sickness as again to engage with the enemy, only again to be disabled, not by wounds, but by sickness; depressed, worn out, exhausted, and miserable at the helplessness consequent on this condition, Sir Douglas Ross had at last to surrender to the force of circumstances, and confess himself a dying invalid.

His letter to Lorimer was the letter of a broken-hearted man; and he proved his consciousness of that fact by its closing words: 'I am not the only officer in command here, whose fate it will be to die not of the privations of the camp, or the wounds received in battle, but of a broken heart.'

And Lorimer knew that only the extreme of fading and failing weakness would have wrung that sentence from his friend and comrade; dear to him from boyhood till the present hour.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Peace in Glenrossie.

THE summer days wore on. Sir Douglas had embarked, and was on his way home! So much at least was known to Gertrude's restless heart. That strange and dreadful life, so busy round him; of alternate wet and cold and heat; of toil to procure water or proper food; of roads impassable, and insufficient clothing; of wounds and cholera and exhaustion; of trenches and pickets; of overloaded troop-ships, and miserable moving of dying men on mules and rough contrivances of planks; decimated companies, and needless sacrifice by neglect and mismanagement of lives that might have been spared—all that was over! But the mortification of inaction, and the private sorrow of heart: these things

remained, ever present with him ; and at first his state of debility was such, that the faithful friend who had joined and now accompanied him, daily expected the bitter task of writing home to say that 'all was ended,' and that the gallant spirit had passed away from earthly struggles to the long peace of death.

A better fate was in store for him. As they neared England, his health improved, and when at length Lorimer Boyd announced their landing at Folkestone, he was also able to add that he hoped, before leaving that port, to break to him all that had occurred since the day that Gertrude had been called to Frere's strange and dreadful sick-bed, and in obeying that call had indeed gained the 'special blessing' which her young son believed would descend on her head !

Once again he wrote from the hotel at Folkestone. Sir Douglas had such an access of despondency on finding himself once more in that saddened England which he had quitted under such grievous circumstances, that he had been confined to his room with low fever. Lorimer owned that at last he risked the shock of a more abrupt communication than he had originally

intended, 'lest our Douglas should die, and never know the truth on this side the grave!'

All had now been told him; the papers given by Gertrude were in his possession, and had been read and re-read with many a bitter groan of vehement self-reproach. He sought no excuse in the chain of circumstances that had led him to deem her false, whose truth had been so dearly proved: though he spoke sorrowfully of the constant concealment of facts which, clearly explained and understood, would have seemed harmless and innocent as they were in reality. He spoke also of the suffering he had endured at times from flashes of torturing doubt, repelled with all the strength of his heart, but recurring at wretched intervals, as on the day when he heard Kenneth so passionately speaking with Gertrude in the morning-room, and found her agitated beyond what a common sympathy in his supposed domestic troubles could reasonably justify. And, lastly, he revealed to Lorimer—with injunctions never while he lived to breathe that secret to mortal ear—the events of that fearful morning when Kenneth, delirious from drunken excess, had attempted his uncle's life, accompanying that

murderous assault with the wild speech :—‘ Part from her yourself ; part from her for ever ! And be sure if *I* do not marry your widow, no other man shall !’

The narrow escape from death which the unsteadiness of the drunkard’s aim had then permitted ; the pain and misery of mind Sir Douglas had undergone, sitting with his bandaged hand throbbing with pain, listening to the treacherous tale of Alice Ross, and reading, as he thought—as any one would have thought—the certain, incontrovertible proof that Gertrude was on the eve of a sinful yielding to the passion so wildly and daringly expressed for her, not only to herself but to her husband ; the pining for her, the haunting of all memories of her, in spite of these convictions ; the yearning for death on the battlefield, and the slow, ignoble, sickly wasting away of life that came instead ; the agony of perplexity caused by Neil’s innocent boyish letters about his mother, and Kenneth, and his young cousin Effie ; the longing he had had to countermand his own strict and solemn injunctions to Lorimer, and entreat for news of Gertrude, of home, of the treasures he had lost and abjured in vain ;—all

this did Sir Douglas acknowledge with an outpouring of the heart that left no thought unknown to the faithful friend who now soothed, and nursed, and consoled him, with assurances of the patient love and lingering hope that had upborne his innocent wife through all the bitter misunderstanding that had parted them.

‘I knew this happier day would come,’ Lorimer wrote to her. ‘I was a true prophet of good; and I think in the depths of your heart you also looked for it sooner or later. Now let me beseech you to try and be as calm and well as possible: and expect Douglas back at Glenrossie with what haste I can permit him to make, being, as I am at present, a combination of sick-nurse and commander-in-chief.

‘You must expect to see him altered, dear Gertrude; he is *very much* altered: very much more deserving of that title of ‘Old Sir Douglas,’ which it once so surprised you he should have obtained. But happiness is a great restorer, and I trust you have both many, many years of such happiness in store.—Yours ever, LORIMER.’

The very sentence thus worded to reassure Gertrude, filled her with that trembling anxiety

which comes to those who love, like an extra sense.

If he should yet be taken from her ! If he should die before he could reach Glenrossie ! If she herself should fail, and faint, and perish before she could once more be folded in his embrace ! Before she could speak words of love, and welcome, and pity, and see him stand on his own threshold-stone, by the side of her Neil, as on that fatal morning when she looked back at them from the carriage-window as she left for Edinburgh, not knowing that look was to be her last ! If, after all, they never should meet again on earth, after all her hopes and her triumphant justification !

Feverish was the life that Gertrude led during these days of helpless expectation. All the care of her which poor Lady Charlotte attempted to take seemed utterly in vain. Eating, sleeping, sitting still for more than a few minutes at a time, were all alike impossible. Yet she obeyed Lorimer's counsel. He had adjured her not to attempt to join them, even should Sir Douglas be delayed on the road by any relapse or variation in health,—at all events, not to come unless sent for. In the tranquillity of his own home, let the broken

soldier recover the agitation which must naturally follow such a meeting as they looked forward to.

She obeyed. She was patient. The day at length dawned, which should give its sunset light to their re-union. She read again and again the sweet brief line in her husband's own handwriting,—‘ My Gertrude, I am coming home to be forgiven.’

‘*Forgiven!* Oh, love! oh, husband! oh, Douglas!’ Scarcely could she refrain from such audible exclamations as broke the miserable meditations of her sleepless nights, when in her former grief she thought of him afar off, soothed by the songs of a stranger's voice.

The day wore on; the sound of wheels rapidly approaching was heard in the avenue. Louder and nearer it came; louder and nearer still; till it suddenly ceased, and the master of Glenrossie Castle stood once more at the portal of his forsaken home.

‘My wife!’ was all Sir Douglas said. Lorimer Boyd had stepped aside as they left the carriage, and caught young Neil to his breast. The aged butler stood trembling and tearful as his master leaned a moment for support on his arm,

and then passed feebly in; while Gertrude, with a mixture of tenderness, suffering, and triumph in her face, such as beams from the countenance of the wife in Millais' unequalled picture of 'The Release,' folded her arms round the stately form whose head bent low as if unworthy of her embrace, and sobbed aloud for very excess of joy.

Nothing could part them more: nothing but death. The long weary grief was over: the lesson of patience ended. There was peace at last in Glenrossie!

What would my readers have more? The rest of my tale is briefly told, or may be briefly guessed. The sorrowful approach of Kenneth the day after his uncle's arrival; humbling himself to the dust before the kindly pitying generous eyes that filled with tears as he bade him welcome.

The triumph of Lady Charlotte, and the frolic of her curl, as she boasted of the justice done at last to her Gertie by the impetuous Sir Douglas, who, 'however superior he might be thought by strangers, had owned himself entirely in the wrong.' The iron spite of the Dowager Clochnaben, who resolutely crushed the tender little woman's joy; assuring her that the world merely

saw the yielding of a 'silly auld carle' in Sir Douglas's misplaced indulgence, 'after all that had happened, you know;' and that as to Kenneth, 'other folk might call it penitence if they pleased, but *she* called it softening of the brain.'

The wondering gladness of Maggie, when the light broke in upon her that her slender Effie would one day hold her place at 'the Castle' as the bride of young Neil, and so melt Torrieburn and Glenrossie into one glad home. And last, not least, the rest of heart that came to Lorimer, lonely though many of his days might be; looking back to the long, long friendship which had ever found him leal and true; from the boyish days at Eton, till the passions and anxieties of early years were looked back to like a dream, and he sat by the winter fire and discussed the hopes and fears of a new generation at Glenrossie, with Old Sir Douglas.

Ailie had disappeared. There was indeed a rumour sent abroad in the narrow circles of Torrieburn and Glenrossie, that far North, in one of the bye-streets of the ancient city of Aberdeen, a spare and slender female lived, who answered her description; and whose occupation it was to

prepare and execute baskets and nets and mats in soft, coloured chenilles.

Soft chenille, that lightly covered the sharp wires beneath ; so that when worn and old and broken, the faded trifles, —ragged and crooked and witch-like,—tore the inexperienced hand that fain would bend them back into shape.

These, in their first freshness, she brought to the various hotels where visitors and sportsmen ‘put up,’ on their tour far North: and they were sold as the work of ‘a decent bodie who had seen better days.’ Furtively, in the dim foggy autumn evenings, that unknown lady made her rounds; scudding swiftly, creeping softly, gazing warily, avoiding all greeting or recognition, gliding round the dark corners from the better streets to her forlorn garret, in a grim and grey stone house five stories high, with little solid windows black with age. She had told the sharp slatternly landlady, she ‘could not pay a heavy rent,’ and she ‘liked a high room:’ she had been ‘used *all her life* to a very lofty’ room, though small.’ All her life !

The high stone staircase, greasy with filth, seemed indeed no fatigue to that spare figure.

Swiftly she passed upward ; so swiftly that the long ends of the shabby light boa she wore round her throat, waved in the air as if it had life : and only sometimes, if she heard voices, or saw some unusual glimmering light on the flats beneath her own as she ascended, she would pause, and peer with half-closed gleaming eyes ; swiftly vanishing out of sight if a door opened, or a foot-fall sounded on those echoing steps of rough-hewn granite.

Never was her own door open : never but by one rare chance, when she had gone out more hurriedly than usual with her chenille-work, because a Royal Princess was passing through the city of Aberdeen.

On that one rare occasion, a little meagre girl, tempted by curiosity, and the vista through the portal of those glossy, soft, bright-coloured materials, with their shining wire frameworks glancing in the light,—stole in and stood by the table, absorbed in a mystery of admiration and contemplation. She never intruded again ! That spare grim lady softly returned ; gripped her suddenly by her bony little shoulders, and shook and ‘ worretted ’ her as a cat might shake

a mouse. She dared not beat her. The 'neighbour' whose child she was, might have hauled the cat-like lady to a police-office. She 'only shook her.' Shook her in a fit of fierce suspicion that the half-starved creature was trying to learn how to make those wire baskets and sheathe their claw-like feet in velvet chenille, in order to rival or undersell their present creator.

But that shaking checked all curiosity for a long time to come, in the terrified little victim,—causing her to sit stunned and stupefied on the topmost step of the stone staircase, though in close vicinity to the awful door,—unable to recover from her giddiness sufficiently to take refuge in the flat below, where she dwelt, in happy squalor, with her bony little sisters and brothers.

Ah! how different was the lone garret in that stony house, from the bright morning-room at Glenrossie!

There once more, in the glowing light of reconciled love, and the glorious autumn sunshine, sat Sir Douglas and his happy wife, talking of the past and future, with voices full of gladness and eyes serene with peace.

Only now and then, with a sigh of fond

regret, Sir Douglas would lament the 'two years of waning life wasted in distrust.' And Gertrude, with her low voice full of all the music of tenderness, would answer that self-reproachful speech with its counterpart: 'I ought to have told you all at first; I ought to have told you!' and echo back his sigh.

Once only she saw her vile and treacherous sister-in-law again. Once, when Sir Douglas and she were on their way to some pleasant visit near Inverness, and during their halt in Aberdeen had taken a stroll in the outskirts of the town, near the sea.

There, in the grey evening, a spare figure stood motionless, gazing out on the dim colourless ocean: then, waving its hands a moment as in some aching despair, it disappeared in the distance.

'What startled you, Gertrude?' said Sir Douglas, as he drew her arm closer within his own.

'I thought I saw AILIE!' she answered quickly; and clung to that dear protecting arm. 'I thought I saw Ailie looking out over the sea!'

Was it then indeed Ailie who dwelt in the

grey and dank stone house, in that dull bye-street of Aberdeen ?

Was it Ailie who stood in that misty evening light, despairing ?

Thinking of the awful day when the smuggler was murdered,—or the day when Frere was hunted down at last,—or the love-days that had ended in such bitter vengeance, begun in the halls of Clochnaben ?—or that hour of peaceful sunshine on the fair mountain side, when she spoke of ‘kith-and-kin love’ to her betrayed half-brother ; while the mavis sang and the harebell waved in the gentle breeze, and he vowed to befriend and protect her ?

Alone now. Alone for ever !

THE END.

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